STATON CUTI WILDMAN BYRNE SUTTON KELLER SATTLER NEWTON ZECK

COMIC BOOK ARTIST

No. 12
March 2001

$6.95
In The U.S.

E-Man & Nova TM & ©2001 Joe Staton.
All others ©2001 their respective copyright holders.

CHARLTON COMICS OF THE 1970s

NEXT ISSUE IN MAY!

#13

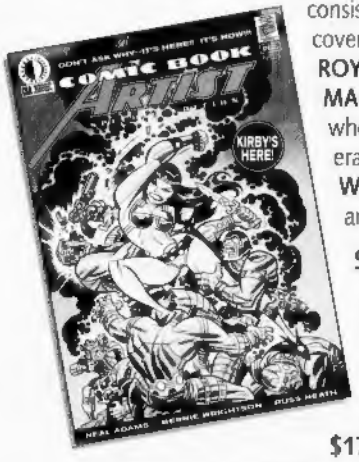
COMIC BOOK ARTIST

THE MARVEL HORRORSHOW!

THE MARVEL HORRORSHOW!
COMIC BOOK ARTIST
No. 13
CELEBRATING THE ARTISTRY OF GENE COLAN & MARV WOLFMAN!
© Marvel
IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THE MARVEL TERROR OF TOWER OF SHADOWS & CHAMBER OF DARKNESS!
PALMER COSTANZA MARCOS FRIEDRICH PERLIN

Tomb of Dracula TM & ©Marvel Characters, Inc. Not actual cover.

COMIC BOOK ARTIST #13 presents **THE MARVEL HORRORSHOW!** Our terrifying 13th issue features **MARV WOLFMAN, GENE COLAN, TOM PALMER,** and **JOHN COSTANZA**—the "Drac Pack" who produced over 65 issues of **TOMB OF DRACULA,** perhaps the most consistently excellent '70s comic series! Behind a new **COLAN** cover, we present interviews with **GENE, MARV, TOM, ROY THOMAS, GARY FRIEDRICH, DON PERLIN, PABLO MARCOS, TONY ISABELLA, HERB TRIMPE,** and others who contributed to Marvel's extensive horror line of that era, from **SON OF SATAN** to **GHOST RIDER, MAN-THING** to **WEREWOLF BY NIGHT,** and more! Plus a spotlight on **TOWER OF SHADOWS** and **CHAMBER OF DARKNESS,** the usual amazing array of **UNPUBLISHED ART** and more!



SUBSCRIBE: Six Issues US: $36 Standard, $54 First Class (Canada: $66, Elsewhere: $72 Surface, $96 Airmail).

PLUS: Subscribers get COMIC BOOK ARTIST SPECIAL EDITION #1 FREE!

An ALL-NEW 68-page extravaganza—with a new Bruce Timm cover—focusing on DC Comics of the '70s, from KIRBY to TOTH, ADAMS to HEATH, WRIGHTSON & more! Get yours FREE by subscribing to CBA—and we're now offering it separately for $10 US postpaid (Canada: $12, Elsewhere: $13 Surface, $17 Airmail) in fairness to readers who can't subscribe due to recent postal increases.

NEW ADAMS, KIRBY, WRIGHTSON, & MORE!

OVER 50 NEW PAGES!

Superman, Big Barda TM & © DC Comics.

COMIC BOOK ARTIST

COLLECTION VOLUME ONE

The **COMIC BOOK ARTIST COLLECTION Vol. 1** reprints the first three sold-out issues of **CBA,** plus over **50 NEW PAGES** of features and art:

- An unpublished story by **JACK KIRBY!**
- An interview with **NEAL ADAMS** about his **SUPERMAN VS. MUHAMMAD ALI** book (including unused art)!
- Unpublished art by **BERNIE WRIGHTSON!**
- Pages from an unused story by **JEFFREY JONES!**
- An extensive new interview with **ALAN WEISS** (including unpublished art), and more!

(228-page trade paperback)

COLLECTING THE FIRST THREE SOLD-OUT ISSUES!
COMIC BOOK ARTIST
NEAL ADAMS JACK KIRBY GARRY WINDSOR-SMITH STAN LEE GIL KANE ROY THOMAS

Hulk TM & © DC Comics. Text and artwork

NOW SHIPPING! $26 US Postpaid (Canada: $28, Elsewhere: $29 Surface, $33 Airmail)

TwoMorrows. Bringing New Life To Comics Fandom.

VISA MasterCard

TwoMorrows • 1812 Park Drive • Raleigh, NC 27605 USA • 919-833-8092 • FAX: 919-833-8023 • e-mail: twomorrow@aol.com • www.twomorrows.com

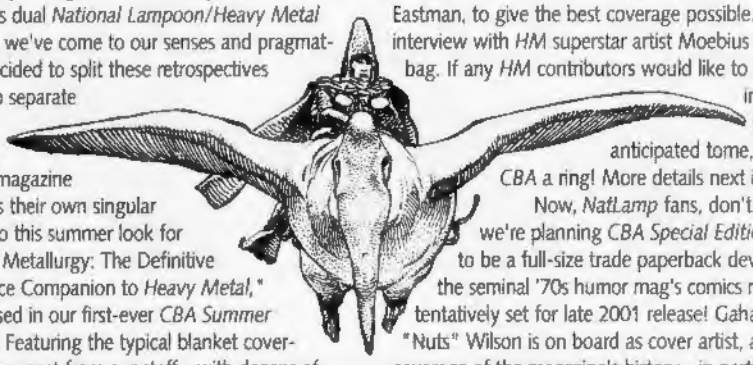
the front page

Plugs, plugs, plugs, more plugs, explainations, plugs, apologies, plugs, & final plugs

HOLD THE PHONE, MALONE!

Heavy Metal Muscles Out National Lampoon!

Okay. Ye Ed has taken his medication now. After ballyhooing the forthcoming *CBA Summer Annual*'s dual *National Lampoon/Heavy Metal* themes, we've come to our senses and pragmatically decided to split these retrospectives into two separate books, as each superb magazine deserves their own singular focus. So this summer look for "Heavy Metallurgy: The Definitive Reference Companion to *Heavy Metal*," showcased in our first-ever *CBA Summer Annual!* Featuring the typical blanket coverage you expect from our staff—with dozens of interviews, articles on *HM*'s parent mag *Métal Hurlant*, rarely-seen and unpublished artwork, and the most definitive checklist of the innovative mag's nearly 25-year run (so far!). We've lined up interviews with many *HM* contributors and are working closely with current *HM* owner, Kevin "Turtleguy" Eastman, to give the best coverage possible. An interview with *HM* superstar artist Moebius is in the bag. If any *HM* contributors would like to be included in this anticipated tome, give *CBA* a ring! More details next ish!



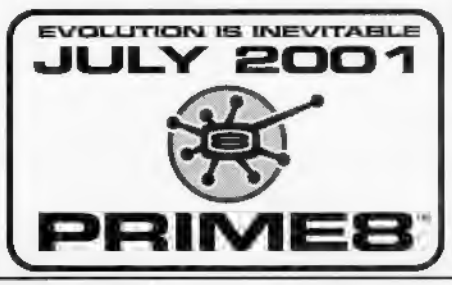
Arzach ™ & ©2001 Moebius.

Now, *NatLamp* fans, don't fret as we're planning *CBA Special Edition* #2 to be a full-size trade paperback devoted to the seminal '70s humor mag's comics material, tentatively set for late 2001 release! Gahan "Nuts" Wilson is on board as cover artist, and coverage of the magazine's history—in particular regard to the comics stuff—will be (again) in typical *CBA* carpet bombing fashion. And we're looking for any and all *NatLamp* artists to give us a shout, so please get in touch!

WARREN COMPANION UPDATE

CBA is please to announce things are going along fantastically for our book on the great horror comics of Warren Publications! Italy's answer to Frank Frazetta, Alex Horley, is busy at work on an all-new wraparound cover painting; co-editor David A. Roach is putting in the last few details for his definitive Warren checklist; Jon B. Cooke as co-editor is finalizing the few remaining interviews with Warren participants and we'll be ready this Summer to release this exhaustive, 288-page retrospective on the publisher of *Creepy, Eerie, Vampirella, Blazing Combat*, and Jim's other innovative mags!

Look for our listing and full-page ad in Diamond's *Previews* catalog and for final announcements next issue. We're looking for this book to be the Big One, folks—the most comprehensive examination of a single comics company in the history of, well, comics history! Containing a full reprinting of *CBA* #4, our sold-out Warren Empire of Horror special—completely redesigned—and containing dozens of new interviews and articles on the publisher's 25+ year history, along with scads of rarely-seen and unpublished art by the greatest comic book artists of all time, we hope this volume grabs both hardcore Warren fans and casual readers alike! Keep ye eyes peeled, effendi!



On Selling CBA Special Edition #1

If you subscribed to *Comic Book Artist* in the last year or so in response to our promotional offer giving subscribers a free copy of *CBA Special Edition* #1, you may be concerned about our back cover advertisement this issue, offering the formerly subscriber-only magazine for general sale. While we certainly appreciate all purchasers of *CBA*—whether by subscription or by picking one up at a comics shop or through mail-order—we are compelled to explain our reasoning and, hopefully, alleviate all concerns.

While giveaways are a commonly used promotion in magazine subscription sales, we would like to stress the exclusive was offered as a matter of *survival* for *CBA*, as the magazine (upon becoming bi-monthly—or close to it, anyway!) became the sole source of income for Ye Editor, who had to give up his nine-to-five advertising job and virtually all freelance work to devote the proper effort in getting out the magazine on a more frequent basis. It was, frankly, either make the *CBA SE* #1 offer or fold up shop—and we are grateful to all who supported us. We must stress that we remain cognizant of the concerns of retailers—many of whom are enormously faithful supporters of *CBA*—at being excluded from handling *CBA SE* #1 and we are determined to include all in any future publications—consumers, retailers, and distributors alike.

One aspect of *CBA SE* #1 disconcerting to our international readers is spiraling postal rates, making a *CBA* subscription simply out of the economic question for many. As we've now made the comic-book size *CBA SE* #1 available through direct mail order, we trust this will rectify things for our overseas supporters.

Newcomers and those still considering purchasing a subscription to *CBA* should note we will continue to offer *CBA SE* #1 free with every new sub received while they last (one to a customer, please).

One last plea: Because of the huge expense incurred on producing *CBA SE* #1, we cannot offer retailers or distributors any discount on quantities. We promise this to be last of the exclusive offers; we're still looking for promotional devices to entice our readers, but pledge not to exclude our appreciated retailers and distributors. We thank everyone for considering this explanation.

So I hope you'll check out *CBA SE* #1 if you haven't already. Ye Ed still considers the mag to be the best publication he's ever had the honor to produce... We ask ya: How can you go wrong with features on and art by Kirby, Heath, Toth, Adams, Wrightson, and Timm, eh?

A NOTE ON CHARLTON COPYRIGHT NOTICES

Because there seems to be some confusion about the specific ownership of a number of Charlton properties (as detailed in Chris Irving's article "Charlton's Twilight and Afterlife" on page 104), *Comic Book Artist* has used the generic phrase "©2001 the respective copyright holder" on images we are unclear of exact ownership. The phrase is used in our sincere effort to be as fair as possible to all parties, whether in dispute or not, and should be in no way construed as to offend or dismay any owners of the actual material or to infringe on said copyrights. *CBA* maintains that all images appearing herein are used for the sake of scholarly purposes via the Fair Use doctrine of U.S. and international copyright law. We welcome letters of comment.

KURTZMANIA!

Ye Ed received no better holiday gift than this past Christmas Eve he opened a package from Dark Horse Comics and was delighted to receive a review copy of *Playboy's Little Annie Fanny Vol. 1*, a spectacular collection of Harvey Kurtzman & Will Elder's sexy satirical comic strip! Ye gods, what a bodacious compilation of stories (which appeared in *Playboy* between 1962-70) from the master of satire! With an extraordinary overview by Denis Kitchen, chockful of fascinating annotations, this tome is a must for any Kurtzmaniac. As you might expect from a *CBA* editor, what pleased me beyond measure was the inclusion of an unfinished and previously unpublished *Annie* strip featuring The Beatles, complete with Jack Davis pencilwork, partially painted by Elder. Plus, every single story—45 in all!—is annotated by our pal Denis! Great job, D.K.! Mr. Kitchen tells us to look for *Vol. 2* next Winter. Available from Dark Horse Comics, $24.95 U.S., 224 pp., ISBN #1-56971-519-X.

©2001 *Playboy*

THE CHARLTON COMICS STORY, PART TWO: 1972-1986

COMIC BOOK ARTIST

NUMBER 12 | CELEBRATING THE LIVES & WORK OF THE GREAT CARTOONISTS, WRITERS & EDITORS | MARCH 2001

Editor/Designer
JON B. COOKE

Publisher
TWOMORROWS
JOHN & PAM MORROW

Associate Editors
CHRIS KNOWLES
DAVID A. ROACH

Contributing Editors
ROY THOMAS
JOHN MORROW

Proofreader
JOHN MORROW
ERIC NOLEN-WEATHINGTON

Cover Art
JOE STATON

Cover Color
TOM ZIUKO

Production
JON B. COOKE
GREAT SWAMP GRAPHICS

Transcribers
JON B. KNUTSON
BRIAN K. MORRIS

Logo Designer/
Title Originator
ARLEN SCHUMER

Mascot
WOODY
by J.D. King

Issue Theme Song
NO BOUT ADOUBT IT

CONTENTS

DEPARTMENTS:

THE FRONT PAGE: LAST MINUTE BITS ON THE COMMUNITY OF COMIC BOOK ARTISTS, WRITERS & EDITORS

On selling CBA Special Edition #1, CBA Heavy Metal Special *details, and more shameless self-promotion*.....1

EDITOR'S RANT: NICE GUYS CAN FINISH FIRST, PART TWO

It's Nick Cuti's turn to take the bouquets as one of the Nicest Editor in Comics sweepstakes.....4

IN MEMORIUM: DOROTHY WOOLFOLK REMEMBERED

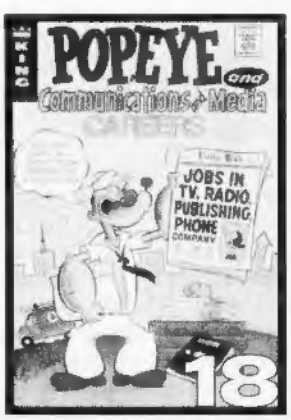
Alan Kupperberg recalls that sweet DC romance editor who just passed away.....5

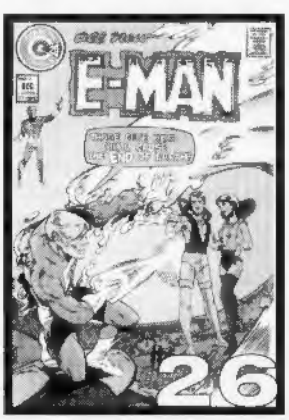
CBA COMMUNIQUES: LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

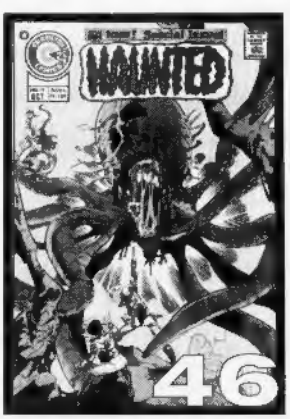
On the Alex Toth/Sheldon Mayer issue, the glory of Sam Glanzman, and a mountain of corrections.....8

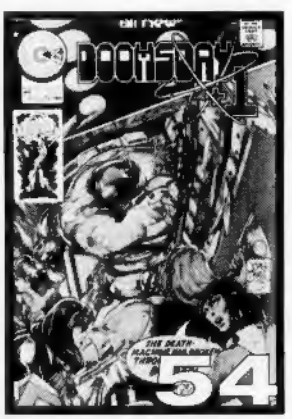
THE BACK PAGE: LEST WE FORGET

Recalling four creators who got away in this issue: Steve Ditko, Fred Himes, Wayne Howard & Sanho Kim..112

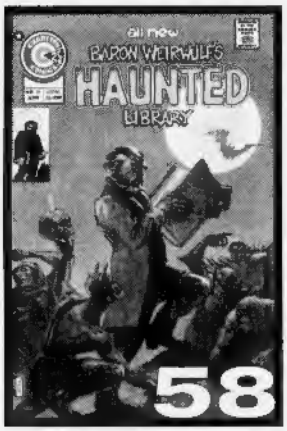


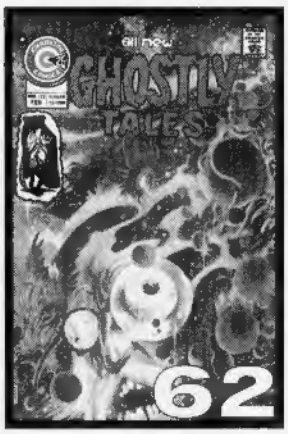


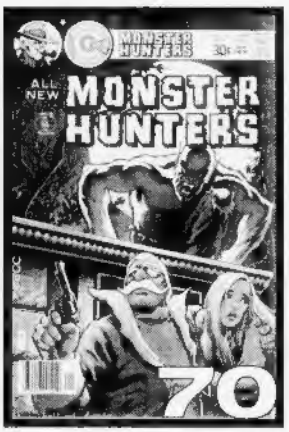


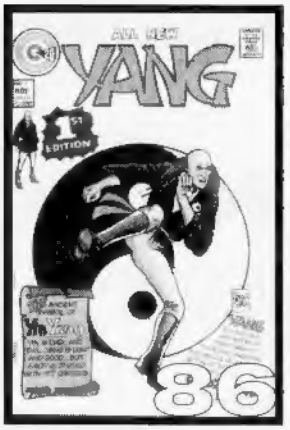


COMIC BOOK ARTIST™ is published bi-monthly by TwoMorrows, 1812 Park Drive, Raleigh, NC 27605, USA. 919-833-8092. Jon B. Cooke, Editor. John Morrow, Publisher. Editorial Office: P.O. Box 204, West Kingston, RI 02892-0204 USA • 401-783-1669 • Fax: 401-783-1287. Send subscription funds to TwoMorrows, NOT the editorial office. Single issues: $9 postpaid ($11 Canada, $12 elsewhere). Six-issue subscriptions: $36 US, $66 Canada, $72 elsewhere. All characters © their respective owners. All material © their creators unless otherwise noted. All editorial matter © their respective authors. ©2001 Jon B. Cooke/TwoMorrows. Cover acknowledgement: All characters ©2001 their respective copyright owners. E-Man ©2001 Joe Staton. First Printing. PRINTED IN CANADA.









THE CHARLTON COMICS STORY: 1972-1983

FRED HEMBECK'S DATELINE: @!!?*
So what if Our Man Fred looks at a spiffy '60s Giordano-era Dr. Graves *tale by Steve Skeates & Jim Aparo!* ..11

FROM THE ARCHIVES: CHARLTON COMICS—1973
Jud Hurd's CARTOONIST PROfiles *article on the unique all-in-one operation at the Derby, Conn. plant* 12

CBA COMMENTARY: ALEX TOTH—'BEFORE I FORGET'
The master comic book artist on his few but memorable contributions to Charlton in the '70s 16

GEORGE WILDMAN INTERVIEW: WILDMAN TIMES AT CHARLTON
Charlton's comics editor (and Popeye *artist) talks about helming the line for over 15 years*.....18

NICOLA CUTI INTERVIEW: CUTI OF THE COSMOS
Artist, writer, and assistant editor at Charlton on reinvigorating the Charlton comics line in the '70s 26

JOE STATON INTERVIEW: MAN OF ENERGY!
Rocco Nigro talks to our cover artist on his Charlton work—from Primus *to* E-Man *to* Space: 1999 46

JOHN BYRNE INTERVIEW: BYRNE'S ROBOTICS
The superstar artist on his humble beginnings at Charlton, Wheelie & the Chopper Bunch, *and Rog-2000* 54

CBA COMICS: E-MAN & NOVA IN "COME AND GROW OLD WITH ME"
Hey, kids! A **NEW** *two-page strip by creators Nick Cuti and Joe Staton featuring our fave bolt of energy!* 56

MARGINALIA: THE ART OF DON NEWTON
Our favorite Welsh comics historian, David A. Roach, on the late artist of Charlton's Phantom *comic* 58

TOM SUTTON INTERVIEW: SUTTON'S LOVECRAFTIAN HORROR
Comics' quintessential horror artist on freedom and expression, however macabre, at Charlton comics 62

MIKE ZECK INTERVIEW: ZECK IN THE HOUSE
Before Secret Wars *and Beastly Nights, there was Mike's start at the Derby, Conn. publisher!*.....70

JACK KELLER INTERVIEW: KELLER ON WHEELS
THE hot rod comic artist/writer from his Golden Age beginnings to his retirement from the field in 1973 78

PETE MORISI INTERVIEW: PAM, ARTIST WITH A VENGEANCE
Glen D. Johnson's second CBA *interview with PAM on the artist's Charlton work in the '70s*..... 84

WARREN SATTLER INTERVIEW: SATTLER IN THE SADDLE
The ubiquitous Yang *and* Billy the Kid *artist on his '70s Charlton work and a long life in comics*.....86

BOB LAYTON INTERVIEW: THE CPL/GANGSTERS IN DERBY
The artist on his fan publishing experiences from Contemporary Pictorial Literature *to* Charlton Bullseye 92

ROGER STERN INTERVIEW: ROG-2001—STERNO SPEAKS!
The future comics writer on robot maintenance, working with Byrne, and doing time at Derby 98

RICH LARSON INTERVIEW: CHARLTON'S COVER GUY
A mini-chat with the "good girl" artist on his short tenure at Charlton 101

DAN REED INTERVIEW: AN OFFER THEY COULDN'T REFUSE
Chris Irving chats with Dan on jumpstarting Charlton Bullseye *and his brief foray at the all-in-one publisher* 102

CLOSING THE BOOKS: CHARLTON'S TWILIGHT AND AFTERLIFE
Chris Irving examines the Charlton copyright morass with sidebars by Bill Black and T.C. Ford 104

Cover image: *After spotting a Charlton house ad in a '70s Seuling Con program book, I suggested to our great cover artist, Joe Staton, to consider "From Horror to Heroes" as a theme, s'long as it included favorite Charlton characters E-Man and Nova Kane. Little did I suspect Joe would render every horror host in the company's history! Can you name them all? The first reader who mails Jon (at the R.I. address below) the correct answers can receive free either a* CBA Collection Vol. 1 *or* CBA Special Edition, *or reserve a free copy of either* The Warren Companion *or the* Heavy Metal Special! *Hurry up, kids! Time's a wastin'!*

Visit CBA on our Website at: www.twomorrows.com/comicbookartist/
All letters of comment, articles and artwork, please mail to:
Jon B. Cooke, Editor, Comic Book Artist, P.O. Box 204, West Kingston, RI 02892-0204
Phone: (401) 783-1669 • Fax: (401) 783-1287 • E-mail: jonbcooke@aol.com

Contributors
Joe Staton • Nick Cuti
George Wildman • Jud Hurd
John Byrne • Tom Sutton
Mike Zeck • Jack Keller • Alex Toth
Peter A. Morisi • Warren Sattler
Bob Layton • Roger Stern
Dan Reed • Rich Larson
Ed Konick • Bill Black • John Lustig
T.C. Ford • Rocco Nigro
Chris Irving • Glen D. Johnson
David A. Roach • Fred Hembeck
Mark Burbey • Jay Willson
Bill Pearson • Roger Broughton
Jim Vadeboncoeur, Jr. • J.D. King
Robin Snyder • Jon B. Knutson
Alan Kupperberg • Don Mangus
Mike W. Barr • Batton Lash
Mike Friedrich • Paul Chadwick
Steve Morger • Rocco Nigro
Fred Himes, Jr. • Barry Keller
John R. Borkowski • Sam Maronie
Joel Thingvall • Albert Vay
Greg Huneryager • Tom Ziuko
Brian K. Morris • Blake Bell
F. San Millan • Dan Adkins
John Castiglia • Mike Curtis

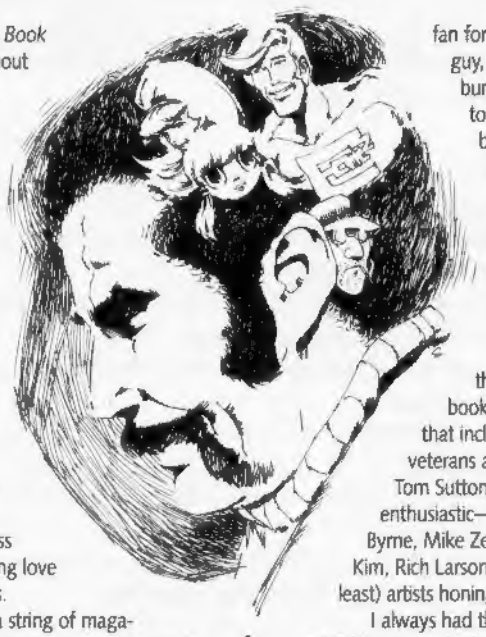
Dedicated to
Nick Cuti
Artist, Writer, Editor

And in memory of
Sam Savitt
Dorothy Woolfolk
G.B. Love

NEXT ISSUE — THE MARVEL HORRORSHOW SPECIAL!

Nice Guys Can Finish First

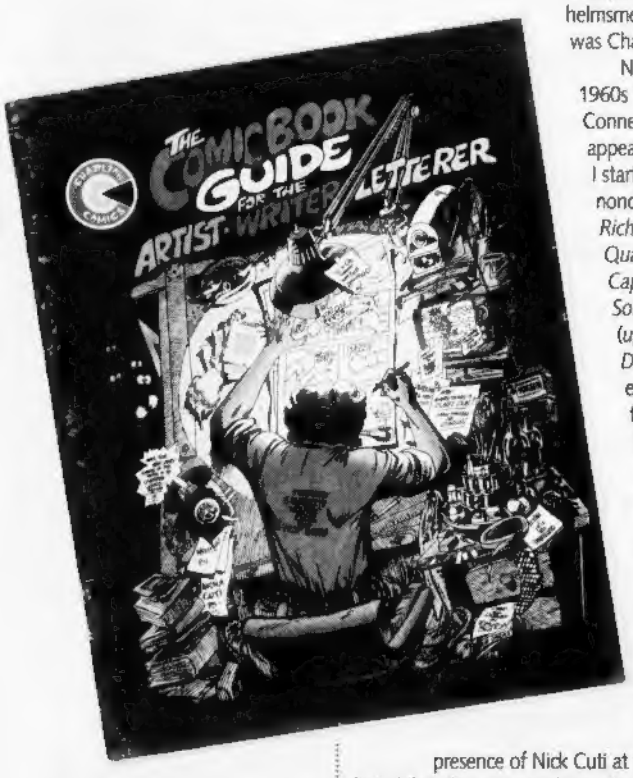
The secret of Nicola Cuti and the art of editing from the heart



Right: *Joe Staton's portrait of his oft-creative partner, Nick Cuti, drawn for* Charlton Bullseye *#1, featuring some characters culled from the writer/artist/editor's imagination—Nova Kane, Mike Mauser, and E-Man. The published version included a headshot of Popeye(!). Reproduced from the original art. Courtesy of Nick Cuti. Nova, E-Man, Mauser ©2001 Joe Staton. Moonchild ©2001 Nick Cuti.* **Below:** *This memorable subscription "gimme" featured not only pro tips for aspiring comics creators, but also nifty illos by Tom Sutton, Steve Ditko, Wayne Howard, and Joe Staton. Courtesy of Nick Cuti. ©2001 the respective copyright holder.*

Let me let you on a little secret: *Comic Book Artist* isn't just about cartoonists at all; it's about great editors adept at fostering comfortable environments for writers and artists to produce superior work. I have possessed an admiration for great magazines even when I could barely read, as I would sift through my oldest sister Becky's collection of *Fantasy & Science Fiction*. My biggest brother Richie's treasured Marvel Comics collection was locked away in an attic trunk, access *verboten* to his troublesome siblings, and to this day, I get this nervous feeling Richie might catch me as I thumb through a copy of *Tales to Astonish*. But Becky didn't mind as I sorted out her *F&SFs*, admiring each Gahan Wilson cartoon, and just plain digging the concept of periodicals. (So, I created my own, at six years old, a scribbly-thing called *You!*, the less said about the better!) Thus began my lifelong love affair with good, solidly produced magazines.

After *F&SF*, came my obsessions with a string of magazines: *National Geographic, Vista, The New Yorker, Locus, Ramparts, Scanlan's, Rolling Stone, National Lampoon, Mother Jones, New Times*... but somehow it was comics that caught my main attention, and I found myself attracted to books with a strong, consistent, positive editorial presence. Stan Lee and Roy Thomas' Marvel line, Julie Schwartz's and Dick Giordano's DC titles, Archie Goodwin's Warren books, even Gold Keys with their anonymous helmsmen were treasured. And then there was Charlton.



Now, I missed out on Dick Giordano's 1960s "Action Hero Line" of the Derby, Connecticut publisher as they first appeared, but when my brother Andy and I started avidly collecting comics, we were nondiscriminating. We snapped up *Richie Rich, Dagar the Invincible, Quack!, Tigerman, UFO Flying Saucers, Captain Canuck, Chilling Tales of Sorcery* (with Sabrina!), even Dell's (*ugh!*) reprinting of their "super-hero," *Dracula*. We were ravenous. (We did establish our own biases between us, though. Andy was into *Spider-Man*, I liked *Fantastic Four*; I collected *The Demon*, while he reveled in *Kamandi*.) Then we started turning our attention to a little comics house called Charlton.

Something was happening there... perhaps not akin to Giordano's heyday... but interesting nonetheless. Pat Boyette's *The Phantom* sucked me in and *E-Man* grabbed my brother. But more than anything it was the presence of Nick Cuti at the Charlton exhibit table during our first Phil Seuling New York Comic Art Convention that made me a Cuti fan for life. He was, plain and simple, a very nice guy, obviously enthusiastic about the line's burgeoning innovations and patient enough to entertain inane questions of two young boys. With a wink, the Charlton assistant editor slapped Tyvek "bullseye" stickers on our T-shirts and graciously gave us his undivided attention. These Derby guys really were the loveable underdogs of comicdom, trying harder, taking chances, and having fun doing it.

But it was the books that solidified my admiration for the sheer chutzpa of the tiny publisher. *E-Man, Yang*, the mystery books, *Doomsday +1, Space: 1999*, all titles that included the work of such accomplished veterans as Steve Ditko, Joe Gill, Warren Sattler, and Tom Sutton, plus the sometimes crude—but always enthusiastic—work of newcomers like Joe Staton, John Byrne, Mike Zeck, Don Newton, Wayne Howard, Sanho Kim, Rich Larson, Bob Layton, young (professionally, at least) artists honing their chops for bigger and better things.

I always had the feeling that Nick's presence in the publishing house had a positive effect on those creators' works. Certainly George Wildman—the managing editor of the comics line, the man who finally established a strong brand for the hitherto nondescript line, the department head who made the assignments, and the guy who hired Nick to begin with—deserves great credit and by no means do I intend to diminish George's accomplishments. But it was Nicola Cuti, assistant editor and eternal fan, who reached out specifically to fandom through convention appearances and by helming the company's innovative promotional tool, *The Comic Book Guide for Artists, Writers and Letterers* (a giveaway booklet available through subscribing to Charlton titles), which revealed the "secrets" of the industry. Amid illustrations by Sutton, Ditko, Staton, and Howard, the tools, formats, procedures, and even the dreaded Code of the Comics Magazine Association of America, Inc., were shared with us snot-nosed punks. While Marvel was mailing out no-prizes and DC spoke down to its readers, li'l Charlton Comics was reaching out to fledgling writers and artists, letting us into the club—like we really mattered!—showing us how maybe one day we too could establish ourselves as pros, and I like to think ol' Nick Cuti had a lot to do with that.

Sure, Charlton's printing could be abysmal, the coloring atrocious, and the pay lousy, but the all-in-one publisher was a helluva place to start for any number of aspiring creators. All of those negatives dim before the light of the freedom given to those artists who made the grade, and by granting it, Charlton had nothing to lose.

So, this issue is for all those who toiled joyously for the late, lamented Charlton Publications. To those who've left us, those who ain't talking, those we couldn't find, and those who graciously shared their stories with us herein and with their work gave us gems among the rough. (But if any of you dear readers encounter Wayne Howard or Sanho Kim, give 'em this issue, will ya? I reimburse you quick like 'coz they need to know they'll never be forgotten.) Let's give 'em all a toast!

Most of all, this one's for that Brooklyn boy made good, Nick Cuti, a fan and a gent and one helluva guy. Me, I'd put his name up there with Archie, Weezie, Roy, and Dick as one of the good guys, every one a legendary editor who made it better for the rest who slaved in an often merciless industry. But we'll keep that our little secret!

—Jon B. Cooke

Dorothy Woolfolk Remembered

Sharing a personal reminiscence of a real sweetie pie editor

by Alan Kupperberg

The inclusion of my story, "Name Dropper" in TwoMorrows' groundbreaking *Streetwise*, has led me to renew or refresh several decades-dormant relationships. Especially Sal Amendola whose acquaintance of 30 years has recently matured into deep respect and solid friendship.

In October 2000, I received a phone call, after a 20-year hiatus, from my first boss in comics, former DC Production Manager Jack Adler, that left me reeling with nostalgia. Then in November, I spent an hour or two with Carmine Infantino at the Second National Comic Book, Art, Toy & Sci-Fi Expo in New York City, bridging an almost 30-year gap.

As with all the fine folks I mentioned before, our conversation eventually turned to Dorothy Woolfolk. I showed Carmine the portrait of Dorothy I'd included in my *Streetwise* story. I was extraordinarily proud of my drawing there because I'd had zero photographic reference from which to work. I must have done okay, because Carmine chuckled and said, "Nice little art style you got there." Thanks, Carmine. Several of my other "little" friends think so, too. Shaking his head, Carmine went on, "That Dotty was a little flaky, wasn't she?"

Some things never change. The "boys club" always snickered behind her back. "Ding-a-ling," "Wolfgang," "Dotty Dorothy," and worse. Outside of the obvious basic sexism at play at "all-male" DC, I think another reason Dorothy was not very respected comes back to the "no running in the halls at DC" mentality.

Because Dorothy Woolfolk really was something. She was a Good-Time Charlie. She must have set a lot of tongues acluck. But she was no flake and not a fink. To me, she was the Tallulah Bankhead, the Auntie Mame of comics.

I thought her books looked good and she got them out on time. People like Liz Safian got breaks through Dorothy. Not to mention Sal Amendola, Howard Chaykin, Mary Skrenes, and Alan Weiss.

She certainly gave me my first (and second, come to think of it) one-pagers, "Page Peterson's Do's & Don'ts Of Dating," beginning in *Young Romance* #183. Vinnie Colletta inked them, natch. He made me look professional, bless him.

I'd lunch or hang out with Dorothy and Carmine Infantino's "right-hand," Carol Fein, at Friar Tuck's tavern after work sometimes. Dorothy treated me like an adult back in the day when that was definitely giving me the benefit of the doubt. She was also very nice to my (then) girlfriend Connie. Dorothy knew that life was too absurd to take very seriously. So she didn't. Would that I could tred as lightly.

I must have been hanging out with Dorothy more than was seemly for a mere "paste-up" guy at caste-conscious DC. I returned to work after lunching with Dorothy one afternoon and Jack Adler sternly ordered me into DC Production Manager Sol Harrison's office and sat me down. Hard.

Closing the door, Sol and Jack gravely demanded to know the truth! To wit: Was I having an affair with Dorothy Woolfolk? I was flummoxed, flabbergasted and several other words that begin with an "f." Like fatootsed and fatchattered. That's Italian. Even today, to say it wasn't so is an understatement, to say the least! And six kinds of yikes. It's thinking like that on their part that gave the recording industry the eight-track!

I was gratified when Roy Thomas' *Alter Ego* V3 #6 ran a photo of William Woolfolk and his daughter Donna, who I took as a ringer for Dorothy. And then in Roy's wonderful *All-Star Companion*, he repro's another photo of William Woolfolk—this time—*YAY*—with

Dorothy Do's & Dont's DATING COUNSELLOR
STORY: SKRENES AND SKEATES ART: ALAN KUPPERBERG
MISS DOROTHY, I ...URP!... NEED YOUR HELP!
OH, GOOD!
COME RIGHT IN, DAHLING!
NO, DON'T COME TOO CLOSE!
OH, YOU'RE SHY, AREN'T YOU!?
NOW JUST GET COMFORTABLE, AND TELL DOTTY ALL ABOUT IT!
I HAVE THIS, ERP, PROBLEM WITH GIRLS!
"WHENEVER I'M NEAR A GIRL, I CAN'T CONTROL MY... PROJECTILE VOMITING!
"I VOMIT, HEAVE, PUKE, TOSS MY COOKIES, UPCHUCK, REGURGITATE OR BLOW MY LUNCH ON EVERY GIRL I DATE!'"
"AND THEY NEVER COME TO THE PHONE AGAIN, EVEN SO I CAN APOLOGIZE."
CLIK
BARF-ETTE
YOU! BOOM BABY!
IT'S SO EMBARRASING, WHAT'LL I DO, DOROTHY!
YOU JUST HAVEN'T FOUND A NICE GIRL YET!
WHY, ANYONE WHO WOULDN'T PUT UP WITH A LITTLE THING LIKE THAT, DOESN'T DESERVE YOU!
...URP!...
FIN

Dorothy herself. Turns out that my drawing of Dorothy was "spot on."

Of course, that same excellent volume almost wrenched my heart out with a very sweet photo of Frank Giacoia. I hadn't seen his image since we lost him in 1989. As I was flipping through that newly purchased tome on the Long Island Railroad, I had to just bite my lip and act manly. Weren't easy, either.

But that photo of Dorothy finally made up my mind for me. The next day, Friday, December 29, I was back home and I pulled out my *Manhattan White Pages*, flipped to the W's and there, in glorious black-&-white, was a listing for "D. Woolfolk." I copied the data onto a Post-it, and smiled in anticipation. Because Dorothy had been, by

Above: *Alan K. writes: "The Skrenes, Skeates, AK piece came about when we were hanging around trying to create work for ourselves. Adrian Lopez was looking for features for his* National Lampoon *knock-off,* Harpoon *(#3, Jan. '75) Almost a beat-for-beat attempt at cloning. We were, alas, harpooning poor Dorothy, or at least her open-hearted and sincere 'motherliness.'" ©1975 Lopez Publications.*

do's & dont's OF DATING
By Page Peterson
I'LL BE DOWN IN A JIFFY, ROGER!
HURRY UP, RUTH!! I DON'T WANT TO BE LATE!
I'M ALMOST READY!
I'VE WAITED FIFTEEN MINUTES ALREADY! I'LL TURN ON THE TV... HOW MUCH LONGER IS SHE GOING TO BE?
HALF AN HOUR LATER!
OKAY, ROGER-- I'M ALL DRESSED. WHERE ARE WE GOING TONIGHT?
WE WERE GOING TO THE BASKETBALL GAME, BUT WE MIGHT AS WELL STAY HERE AND WATCH TV!
OOPS! I'M REALLY GOING TO BE LATE!
NEVER MIND! IT DOESN'T MATTER NOW!
NEXT WEEK, IN PAGE PETERSON'S OFFICE...
I COULDN'T FIND A DRESS TO WEAR... I CHANGED FOUR TIMES! AND MY HAIR WAS IMPOSSIBLE! BUT ROGER'S STILL ANGRY AT ME!
FRANKLY, I DON'T BLAME HIM!
WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO WAIT 45 MINUTES FOR HIM?
YOU KNOW YOU'D BE FURIOUS IF I'D BE FAIR, RUTH!
OH, PAGE!
I'VE NEVER LOOKED AT IT FROM THE GUYS POINT OF VIEW! THANKS, PAGE!

Above: *Alan Kupperberg writes: "When Dorothy graciously showed faith in a green 18-year-old kid in the DC production department by giving him his first pro penciling job, she sat down at her typewriter and banged out the script for this one-pager, one-two-three. With a Woolfolk script, Ben Oda lettering, Vincent Colletta's inking and even a Howard Chaykin gal in panel three, this comic classic has a pedigree spoiled only by my barely adequate participation as penciler and colorist. It originally appeared in* Young Romance *#183, June 1972. ©2001 DC Comics.*

my lights and in my experience, a good friend. It would be nice to talk to her again.

But, as it was Friday—and noon at that—I was off to stretch my legs. A short walk to Village Comics on Sullivan Street (just around the corner from Roy Thomas' legendary 1960s Bleecker Street digs he shared with Bill Everett and Gary Friedrich).

As I crossed Sixth Avenue, I realized how tickled Dorothy would be if a bunch of young guys she gave a break to were to take her out to dinner 30 years later, as some small token of thanks. I know Alan Weiss and Sal Amendola would be up for it. This was starting to sound like a lot of fun. And maybe even a "mitzvah," to boot.

I purchased the new *Comic Buyer's Guide* (#1417, January 12, 2001) and I even picked up several extra copies of *Streetwise*, so I'd have one for Dorothy.

Back home I happily perused the new *CBG*—until page 56—and the first item in the regular "Clipping Service" column—Norman Tippens of *The Daily Press* of Hampton, Virginia, reported December 6 the November 27 death of Dorothy G. Woolfolk. In an August 1993 article in the Florida *Today* newspaper, she said she was involved in the introduction of kryptonite to the Superman mythos. She was DC's first woman editor and indicated in that article that she had found Superman's invulnerability was boring. "She told the newspaper she reasoned that since Superman came from the planet Krypton, he would be helpless before a piece of kryptonite. She also was instrumental in developing the personality of Lois Lane and directing a wardrobe makeover for Clark Kent." The obituary said she met her former husband, William, when she rejected a Superman script he'd submitted. She was a lifelong resident of New York City until moving to Norfolk, Virginia in 1996 and later to St. Francis Nursing Center. A memorial service was held at the center December 2.

Woolfolk is survived by her son Donald, and daughter, Donna, four grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. The family requested memorial donations be made to Avalon—a center for Women and Children, P.O. Box 1079, Williamsburg, VA. 23187. Sent [to CBG] by David Weaver of Benders Books & Cards.

"No!" Not two hours after I copied out her phone number! And then hot tears wet my cheeks in a rush. Because there was no one to put a front on for, and I was feeling real sorry for myself and the whole sorry world for losing another pioneer.

Dorothy Roubicek was a pioneer. Quoting shamelessly and verbatim from Roy Thomas and his *All-Star Companion*: "Roubicek was an [*All-American Comics*] editor from 1942-44. From 1945-46 she was an editor for Timely/Marvel, and in 1948 for EC Comics. During 1971-72 she returned to DC to edit *Lois Lane*, *Wonder Woman*, and other titles. She scripted an occasional comics story—including *Wonder Woman* at some point in the 1940s, making her the first female to do so. In the early 1950s she also wrote for *Orbit*. She was married at one time to comics writer (and best-selling novelist) William Woolfolk, and is thus often listed as 'Dorothy Woolfolk.'"

LEAPIN' LIZARDS, AMELIA! ALAN KUPPERBERG MAY BE OUR NEW ARTIST--
--BUT LIFE AIN'T GETTIN' ANY EASIER!
arf!
ALAN KUPPERBERG
© 2001 Tribune Media Services

Right: *A.K.'s rendition of Little Orphan Annie. ©2001 Tribune Media Services.*

Thank you, Roy—again. Dorothy certainly did oversee Clark Kent's wardrobe makeover for a big spread in *GQ* magazine. *GQ* had photos taken of Dorothy's tantalizingly-togged models. Then Murphy Anderson provided the art overlays for the faces of Lois and Clark, etc. (Hmm—do you suppose DC thought Jack Kirby was the photographer? Nah!) So DC must've respected Dorothy's media savvy. Besides, can you picture Murray Boltinoff picking ties for *GQ*?

In the face of the same smugness that allowed Marvel to overtake DC in a romp in those days, Dorothy Woolfolk more than held her own and had fun while she did it. Unencumbered by a male ego, Dorothy didn't make her freelancers submit to abuse, as some of her male counterparts did.

One does not need to be a very keen observer to note that our business and we are loosing our founding fathers and mothers at an ever-accelerating rate. It is , of course, the way of things. I guess the best we can do is try not to put off , for that extra day, reaching out to those who blazed our trail and still walk among us.

As for Dorothy Woolfolk, she still walks—in my heart—along with Frank Giacoia, with Wally Wood, with Vinnie Colletta, and all the rest.

Creators then. Inspirations still.

A message from Alan Kupperberg: *Leapin' lizards! It was Christmas time, 1970. Steve Mitchell and I had inveigled an invitation into the sanctum—Tex Blaisdell's cozy, paneled studio in his home in snow-blanketed Whitestone Queens, New York. We watched in wonder as that veteran cartoonist crafted the latest episode of* Little Orphan Annie. *He had recently taken over the strip after the death of its creator, Harold Gray and he continued the art very much in Gray's style. Leonard Starr followed Tex in an incredible run after a spell of classic Gray reprints, and artist Andrew Pepoy and writer Jay Maeder have recently rebooted Annie as teen of the new millennium.*

Now, in Annie's 75th year, I'm proud to sign aboard with Tribune Media Services as the redheaded mop-top's artistic mentor. Beginning Monday, April 2, 2001, scripter Jay Maeder and I promise Annie the high-flying ride of her life, and not a few surprises for the sharp-eyed comic strip buff. Don't be shy about contacting the feature editor of your local newspaper if you want Annie *and you're not receiving it. Together we can make sure the kid makes it to at least a hundred without a wrinkle! Arf!*—**A.K.** *<kupperberg@aol.com>*

THE FIRST COMPREHENSIVE BOOK ABOUT GIL KANE AND HIS ART

THIS EXHAUSTIVE LOOK AT GIL KANE, HIS CAREER AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS INCLUDES:

* OVER 150 EXAMPLES OF ORIGINAL AND UN-PUBLISHED ART WORK

* AN EXTENSIVE ESSAY PUTTING KANE AND HIS ART WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF 20TH CENTURY ART

* LENGTHY CHECKLIST SPANNING KANE'S ENTIRE CAREER

* SIXTEEN PAGE COLOR SECTION

SPECIAL PRE-PUBLICATION SUBSCRIPTION PRICE OF $28.99 POSTAGE PREPAID (USA ONLY) FOR THE PERFECT BOUND SOFT COVER AND $47.99 POSTAGE FOR THE HARDBOUND NUMBERED LIMITED EDITION OF 250 COPIES WITH SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL NOT FOUND IN THE THE SOFT COVER. AVAILABLE IN MARCH/2001.

CONTACT DANIEL HERMAN WITH INQUIRIES

SEND CHECK TO: HERMES PRESS, 2100 WILMINGTON ROAD, NEW CASTLE, PA 16105, 724-652-0511, FAX 724-652-5597,
GEEHERM@SGI.NET

BACK WITH A VENGEANCE IN MARCH!

#3

COMICOLOGY™

Cover by & In-Depth Interview with

Carlos PACHECO

Flash! Inhumans! Fantastic Four!

... And Pacheco's Own Annotations to His Art on the Epic AVENGERS FOREVER!

Featuring gobs of rare and previously unpublished pencil art!

(Edited by Brian Saner Lamken • 100 pages)

Comicology & its logo are trademarks of Harbor Studios Inc. Avengers Forever characters are trademarks of Marvel Characters Inc. Other characters are trademarks of DC Comics.

SUBSCRIBE NOW! Four Issues in the US: $20 Standard, $32 First Class (Canada: $40, Elsewhere: $44 Surface, $60 Airmail).

TwoMorrows. Bringing New Life To Comics Fandom.

VISA MasterCard

TwoMorrows • 1812 Park Dr. • Raleigh, NC 27605 USA • 919-833-8092 • FAX: 919-833-8023 • e-mail: twomorrow@aol.com • www.twomorrows.com

CAN YA HELP OUT COMIC BOOK ARTIST?

COMIC BOOK ARTIST is proud to feature some incredibly rare material—from artists' personal memorabilia to unseen art—but to continue to feature this great stuff for your pleasure, we are in desperate need of your help! [And please inquire via letter about writers' rates and guidelines.]

BUT we need **YOUR** treasures for **CBA** to continue. **PLEASE** consider sharing copies of your material and take note of the following list:

CBA NEEDS:

- Unpublished artwork
- Convention sketches
- Commission work
- Thumbnails and roughs
- Original scripts
- Old fanzine articles
- Photographs
- Documents & Personal correspondence
- Unused or rarely-seen interviews

Here's a rough breakdown of upcoming issue themes you may help with:

- **THE MARVEL HORRORSHOW.** Headlined with a celebration of *Tomb of Dracula* creators Marv Wolfman, Gene Colan, and Tom Palmer, we also delve deep into the Atlas horror material of Dick Ayers, Joe Maneely, Don Heck, etc., the "monster" era of early Marvel, as well as other spooky books of Marvel's '70s "Second Wave." The highlight will be a huge Colan section.
- **HEAVY HITTERS OF THE '70s.** John Buscema, Sal Buscema, Ross Andru, Mike Esposito, Len Wein, George Peréz, and other '70s stalwarts finally get their due, with plenty of the usual unpublished art and special feature you've come to expect from *CBA*.
- **THE OTHER GUYS!** Due to HUGE popular demand, we're hard at work tracking down interviews and art covering some of the lesser-known lights of the industry, including Tower Comics, ACG, Skywald, Atlas-Seaboard, and more! The amount of material we find will determine whether these companies get their own solo issue, or are combined into one. So let us know whatcha got!

ADVERTISE WITH US!

FULL-PAGE: 7.5" Wide x 10" Tall • $300
HALF-PAGE: 7.5" Wide x 4.875" Tall • $175
QUARTER-PAGE: 3.75" Wide x 4.875" Tall • $100

THE TWOMORROWS TWO-FER!

Prepay for two same-size ads in **Comic Book Artist, Alter Ego, Comicology, DRAW!,** or any combo and these discounts apply:

TWO FULL-PAGE ADS: $500 ($100 savings)
TWO HALF-PAGE ADS: $300 ($50 savings)
TWO QUARTER-PAGE ADS: $175 ($25 savings)

The above rates are for black-&-white ads, supplied on-disk (TIF, EPS, or QuarkXPress files acceptable) or as camera-ready art. Typesetting service available at 20% mark-up. Due to our already low ad rates, no agency discounts apply. FREQUENCY DISCOUNTS ARE AVAILABLE; PLEASE INQUIRE. Sorry, display ads are NOT available for **The Jack Kirby Collector.**

Send ad copy and check/money order (US funds) payable to:

TwoMorrows
1812 Park Drive
Raleigh, NC 27605
Phone: (919) 833-8092
Fax: (919) 833-8023
E-mail: twomorrow@aol.com

We also accept VISA and MASTERCARD!
Include card number and expiration date.

VISA MasterCard

Toth's CBA & Truman on Glanzman

Plus CBA context, corrections, controversy, and checklists

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Right on deadline, we received a mountain of Toth Checklist corrections from* **F. San Millan,** *an expert on Alex's work from France. We'll try and list 'em all next ish. Thanks, FSM!* **Note to James Romberger:** *Toth's The Question strip appeared in the fanzine* Charlton Bullseye, *not the color comic of the same name.*

Chris Brown
Anaheim, California

First off, *Comic Book Artist* is my absolute favorite comics publication, ever! I've had to cut back on my actual comic book purchases, but still find the $$ for your mag, particularly when the subject is someone like Alex Toth!

Still, I have a complaint about this issue, and it's something I've noticed in other issues, as well. When a writer or artist is discussing a specific issue or scene, I think you should reproduce the pages in question. For example, at various points Toth makes long reference to a Torpedo story (p. 25), "White Devil, Yellow Devil" (p. 26), and "Burma Sky" (p. 44). I have no idea what these stories are, where they appeared (I know, I know, that's what the checklist is for), or exactly what he is referring to. Exactly what is so wrong with the last page of "Burma Sky?" I wish there was a picture of it so I could see what he was talking about.

Similarly, there were a few points where some editorial notes would have been helpful. For example, in Jim Amash's 1991 interview, he writes: "I know about you meeting Jack Cole, but since I'm going to reprint the letter you wrote about meeting him, I won't ask for that story again." But *you* didn't reprint that letter! So now I don't know about that meeting! You tease! Also, there's that comment Toth makes: "We hadn't talked to each other since that 1952 incident, on that 'Sabrejet' job, because I dared to change one or two panels!" I can infer what the conflict was about, but I don't really know exactly what Toth was doing for Kurtzman, or what the incident really was.

I know space is tight—it's amazing you fit as much as you do into each issue. So what to cut? I would say things like that Space Ghost illo on page 27, which has been reprinted many times, and some of the Hanna-Barbera stuff, like the Tiger Joe illo, which isn't that interesting (to me) and isn't directly comic book-related. Maybe the two *Black Hood* covers on pages 36-37 and the large (and beautiful) Black Canary pin-up on page 39 could have been smaller? And while that "name salute" on page 44 was sort of interesting, I know from the interviews the artists Toth admires and don't really need to see a sample of his lettering.

Small complaints though! I'm looking forward to the article on Don Newton!

[*Context is an important component too often missing in CBA and we'll continue to address that—though I wonder if readers detect a bit too much context in the exhaustive Charlton two-parter!*—**JBC**]

MAR 7
Natives started in this way
then shimmied rest of way up—
PURPLE AND RED BUSHES — smell and look like giant clover
natives selling coconuts, bananas and beer, one buck.
they get the fruit from the trees— make baskets from palms — right on the spot
MAR. 9, '44
Shelling practice off Tutu (Ellis Is.)
Mar. 14 out to sea 0600, return to port 1600— keeped two outside nets
out to sea 0500
bound for Kaving New Ireland
JUNE 27, 1944- left Sia to Marshalls to iron-
SCUTTLEBUTT
GUAM?
JERRY BOYLE KEPT A RUNNING LOG -- WRITTEN AND SKE
SHIP HAD BEEN... EVENTS AND HAPPENINGS... DAILY ROUTI
IN GENERAL AS VIEWED BY A DESTROYE
Palm leaf basket
beep
leaves

Left: *It should come as no surprise to frequent CBA readers that we're huge admirers of Sam Glanzman, the man and his work.* **Below** *is SJG's sketchbook entry for March 9, 1944, chronicling the artist/writer's WWII experiences as a U.S. seaman in the Pacific. Sam based his extraordinary "U.S.S. Stevens" comic stories on his real-life observations, as evidenced by the page at left, from "Between the Pages" in* Our Army at War *#293. Left ©2001 DC Comics. Below ©2001 Sam J. Glanzman.*

Tim Truman
via the Internet

Just wanted to let you know how much I'm enjoying my subscription to *Comic Book Artist*, and the other books from your company that I've been receiving. There's really some good, inspiring, informative reading in the magazine, which is exactly what I expected when I subscribed, and I'm sure, exactly what you've been intending to deliver.

I really enjoyed the Women Cartoonists interviews in #10. Trina was the perfect candidate for handling the interviews, given her position in the field, her knowledge of the historical and artistic aspects of the genre, and her views on same. A very discussions, well transcribed. The lively conversationality of the forums really came across well. Ramona Fradon and Marie Severin, especially, have always been two of my favorite artists, and seeing them have this chance to express their viewpoints and their personal histories was just great. These two women provided me with much inspiration when I was younger. I've always wanted more information on Ramona Fradon, especially. Her work was so jarringly refreshing when I first encountered it in the '70s Marvels—so well-rendered and prosaic.

Those that know me and my own work in the field know that John Severin is one of my biggest influences, so reading Marie's comments about her work with her brother was an enlightening experience. As for Marie's own work, I'd buy anything that had her inking or penciling credits on it. She is one of the greats of the industry. I always remember that whenever her name was brought up to any of my instructors during my days at the Kubert School, the instructors would invariable preface any comment with "Marie! What a sweet heart she is!" Their admiration for her as both an artist and as a good person was undeniable.

I also enjoyed the Walt Simonson interview. Another huge influence on me and just about any cartoonist of my generation. I've seldom become engaged in a conversation with other cartoonists of my particular era without Simonson's name coming up as a primary inspiration. Guys like Walter, Paul Gulacy, Mike Kaluta, Bernie Wrightson, Jeff Jones, Barry Smith, Mike Golden, Howard Chaykin and Marshall Rogers were the probably the top innovators working at the larger four-color companies who inspired the "independent comics" generation that immediately followed them.

Joe Staton's name should be in there, too. I'm really anxious to read Joe's interview in the next issue. Joe is one of the most "natural artists" I've ever met. In his interview, Walt mentions cartoonists who seem to have cameras or projectors in their heads—they seem to just project invisible images from their brains to the paper and then trace them magically. Joe is one of those guys. When he was art director at First Comics and I was doing *Grimjack*, I sat by Joe at many conventions and watched in amazement as he would do sketch after sketch for people, effortlessly translating the images in his head down to the paper. Drawing was always a struggle for me, especially at that point in my career, so watching those perfect images flow from Joe's pencils, brush and markers was always incredibly inspiring and humbling.

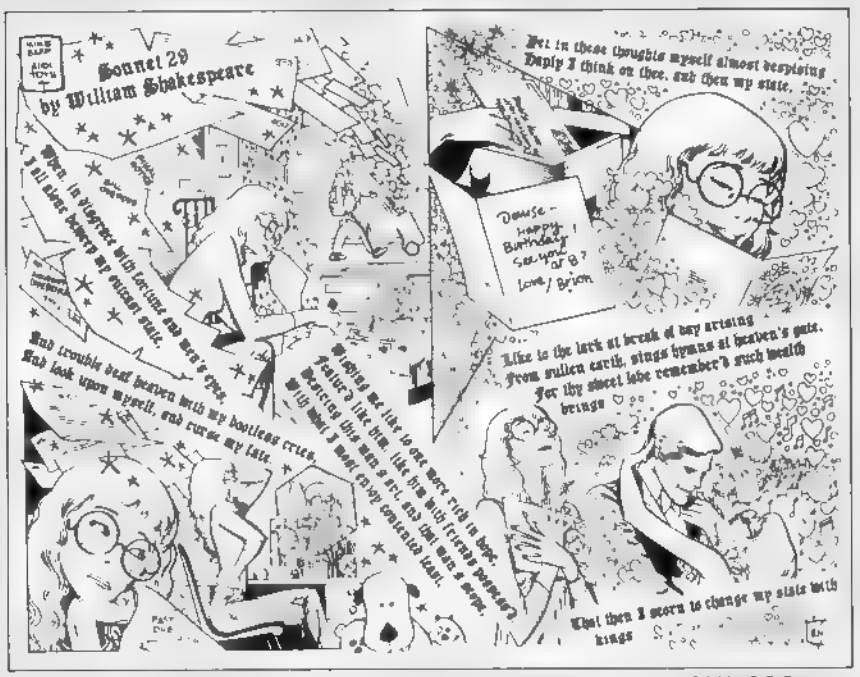
Inspiring. That word keeps coming up in this letter, doesn't it? Thanks for helping to provide so much of it via the interviews in your magazine. For those of us who love the graphic story as a medium for both art and entertainment, inspiration is important, especially during these troubled times in the genre when our avenues for personal expression seem to be dwindling more and more each week.

Before I close, I'd also like to thank you for the interview with Sam Glanzman a few months back. Sam's work has always shaken me to the core, and it's been an honor to work with him over the years, as publisher and editor of his *Attu* graphic novels and co-artistic collaborator with him on the *Jonah Hex* books for DC. Sam and I have always shared a strange bond, artistically and personally. We talk to each other quite often. However, on two different occasions I've had Sam's work spread out across my drawing desk, studying various details in it, when he's given me phone calls out of the clear blue. On both occasions, before I could tell him that I was just studying his work, he's told me that he had my work out on his desk, and just had to call me to say how much he enjoyed it. Hearing things like that from someone whose work you admire so tremendously really gives you a shot in the arm. His work means more to me than I'll ever be able to express. By the way, Steve Bissette did the best declaration of appreciation for Sam's work that I've ever read in the preface for one of the *Attu* books that I published. It's a brilliant treatise on Sam's career.

CBA TOTH/MAYER Issue Corrections

While telling us all went well with the issue, Alex Toth gave us some corrections regarding images in the last issue: "Missing Irwin Hasen's name in the many on page 44! My goof, my shame .. Pg. 16 'Johnny Thunder' pencil ruff looks like Gil Kane (then-Gil Stack) affecting my style upon my exit from the series! Ditto, the finished 'Johnny Thunder' cover on pg. 15—a bit too fussy/noodly for it to have been mine. I think I've questioned both items before! But bad pennies seem always to turn up! Wot? Let's quash this now!.. The panel blow-up on pg. 18's bottom of the 'Gloster Gladiator' is not from *Bravo* at all—but from my 'Burma Sky' story for DC/Archie Goodwin's good script enthused!... Pg. 25's cover was for *Supermarket* mag, not *Clothes*... mistaking my late wife's '67 Buick Skylark ragtop for (shudder) an Impala (!?!) (Why guess in the first place?) " Ye ed promises to stick to speculating on comics history and avoid guessing at car makes and models, something he knows nothing about!

While Alex believes the Shakespeare sonnet on page 42 (reprinted below) was published by DC, Mike W. Barr wrote us (in a letter that included the illustration but ye ed neglected to run Mike's comments last issue—sorry, MWB):



©2001 DC Comics.

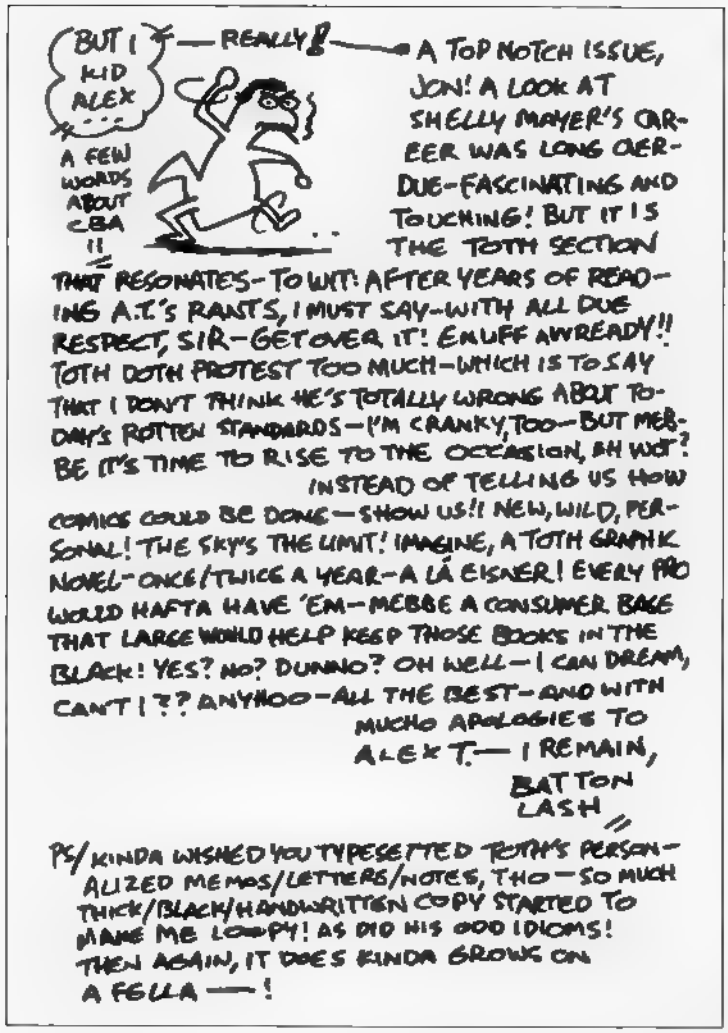
"Enclosed is an unpublished collaboration between Alex Toth and myself. I commissioned it when I was editing *The Outsiders* back in the mid-'80s. By the time it came in, I had been fired off the editorial end of the book, and those who took my place had no interest in publishing anything other than fight scenes.

"I have no idea what happened to the original, but this was shot from it, perhaps at 100% size. Interestingly, Alex just took the sonnet from my script—which I had transcribed in an "Olde English" font, just to put him in the mood—and pasted it up directly onto the boards. I had been trying to get Alex interested in anything, but this was the only thing he 'bit' at. He hates superheroes, so I figured he might like something romantic, in which all the characters appear in civilian dress. And it's too good to remain unseen." [*Mike W. Barr's recent loc is on the page following.*]

Our favorite Atlas fanatic, Dr. Michael J. Vassallo, writes: "Doc V. here! Loved the Toth issue. Allow me to make a correction to your Toth index, though. The story 'Just My Type' in *Love Romances* #48 is not by Toth. It's Mike Sekowsky doing his best Toth imitation, perhaps with Peppe thrown in. I sent this story to Jim Amash who passed it on to Toth who confirmed it wasn't him. I told Jim V. also and he's updated his index accordingly."

Mark Tomlinson tells us, "Just wanted to let you know that I was the person that contributed the Space Ghost pin-up listed on page 27. Also, the Toth checklist was great, but I did notice one omission: The pin-up from the *Wonder Woman Gallery*, which was published in the mid-'90s." Sorry about that, Mark! And imagine us forgetting Alex's *Batman Black and White* #4 cover, too!!!

Perhaps most importantly, Merrily Mayer Harris, Sheldon's daughter, tell us we had the wrong date listed for her parents' wedding on the Mayer Timeline. It should have read March 14, 1943, not May 13. Our sincere apologies to Merrily and Lanney.


BUT I KID ALEX... A FEW WORDS ABOUT CBA !!
— REALLY? —
A TOP NOTCH ISSUE, JON! A LOOK AT SHELLY MAYER'S CAREER WAS LONG OVERDUE-FASCINATING AND TOUCHING! BUT IT IS THE TOTH SECTION THAT RESONATES-TO WIT: AFTER YEARS OF READING A.T.'S RANTS, I MUST SAY-WITH ALL DUE RESPECT, SIR-GET OVER IT! ENUFF AWREADY!! TOTH DOTH PROTEST TOO MUCH-WHICH IS TO SAY THAT I DON'T THINK HE'S TOTALLY WRONG ABOUT TODAY'S ROTTEN STANDARDS-I'M CRANKY, TOO-BUT MEBBE IT'S TIME TO RISE TO THE OCCASION, EH WOT? INSTEAD OF TELLING US HOW COMICS COULD BE DONE-SHOW US!! NEW, WILD, PERSONAL! THE SKY'S THE LIMIT! IMAGINE, A TOTH GRAPHIC NOVEL-ONCE/TWICE A YEAR-A LA EISNER! EVERY PRO WOULD HAFTA HAVE 'EM-MEBBE A CONSUMER BASE THAT LARGE WOULD HELP KEEP THOSE BOOKS IN THE BLACK! YES? NO? DUNNO? OH WELL-I CAN DREAM, CAN'T I?? ANYHOO-ALL THE BEST-AND WITH MUCHO APOLOGIES TO ALEX T.— I REMAIN, BATTON LASH
PS/ KINDA WISHED YOU TYPESETTED TOTH'S PERSONALIZED MEMOS/LETTERS/NOTES, THO-SO MUCH THICK/BLACK/HANDWRITTEN COPY STARTED TO MAKE ME LOOPY! AS DID HIS OOD IDIOMS! THEN AGAIN, IT DOES KINDA GROWS ON A FELLA —!

It always makes me mad when I read comics pundit polls of "The Greatest American Graphic Novels" and never see Sam's two *A Sailor's Story* books mentioned. These books are two unrecognized and undervalued masterpieces of autobiographical history, and are serious rare accomplishments in out medium. I'd love to see (or do?) an interview with Sam about these works alone sometime.

Another thing about Sam that you should know about—and which, indeed you might be in the position to do something about, come to think of it. When I was at the Kubert School Joe always told me about a wonderful collection of illustrated letters and sketches that Sam has accumulated from his family. These were letters that young sailor Sam had sent to his family while he was overseas during WWII. The letters are amazing—a graphic "sketch diary" of his days in the war, profusely and beautifully illustrated. There are hundreds of pages of this material. My wife and I once spent two hours with Sam and his wife at their kitchen table, going through Sam's folders of WWII letters and sketches. there is *certainly* enough material for a book—one which would be of interest not only to comics fans, but also for WWII military historians, and, if collected in book form would be suitable for any museum archive (or bookstore?). I officially and humbly offer you any services required if you'd ever entertain notions of publishing the material—to approach Sam, to help collect and edit the material, to conduct any interviews with him and help him put the work together. It would be a dream come true for me, and I think for Sam, too, though he'd be too modest to admit it. Please consider this. The material is incredible.

Oh, well, enough of my babbling. Any news on the whereabouts of Sanho Kim? Another great favorite of mine. I've always wondered what happened to him.

[*Thanks for the letter! See pg. 112 about Sanho Kim.* **JBC**]

R.G. Taylor
via the Internet

Congratulations and thank you for the glorious Toth issue. The maestro's work had been well documented, so I was surprised and delighted to see so many unseen pieces.

I still have my copy of "Wings of Eagles." I bought off the stands when I was a child. It was then and remains my favorite comic, even though I have read tens of thousands of funnybooks in the interim.

I had the pleasure of meeting Alex at a convention in Toronto more than ten years ago when I was illustrating *Wordsmith* for Renegade. He was gracious and encouraging, and I saw no evidence of his curmudgeon qualities. A young girl approached for an autograph. Alex questioned her about her occupation and she proudly announced she was an archaeology student. Before she could blink, Alex launched into a fascinating and detailed discourse about a recent dig in Egypt. It was pretty clear that Alex knew a hundred times more about the subject than the girl would ever know.

Anyhow, a number of us Canuck artists are Toth worshippers (Ken Steacy, Paul Rivoche, of course, Seth and many others.) Over the years we've traded photocopies of our favorite Toth stories. In my "Toth war stories" binder I have a great little story called "Burma Sky" written by Archie Goodwin. I'm not sure where it originally appeared. [*In* Our Fighting Forces *#174.*—**JBC**] The aircraft picture you've printed on page 18 is in fact the bottom panel of page 4 of that story, and not a *Bravo* picture.

Keep up the great work. Your magazine is an inspiration and I continue to look forward to each issue.

Tim Barnes
via the Internet

Somebody [*in* CBA *#11*] was asking after Leo Summers. I had a feeling he died somewhile back but couldn't think how come I'd heard this. Anyhow, I eventually found my copy of Bob Weinberg's *A Biographical Dictionary of Science Fiction and Fantasy Artists* (Greenwood Press, 1988). According to this, Leo Ramon Summers, who was born June 9, 1925, was stricken with a brain seizure in 1975, had brain surgery in 1979 and finally died of brain cancer April 1, 1985. (Same fate, incidentally, as I understand befel one of my favorite actors, Richard Jordan.) And on that cheery note, I'll leave you until I dig up more detail on Toth's film work.

Jeff Clem
via the Internet

The new Toth Mayer *CBA* issue is fantastic and made a great birthday present for myself! It must have been tough to put together—I mean, what to leave out, right? It's all great and you only have so many pages! I am not a fan of Shelly Mayer's stuff; however, I do recognize his importance to the history of comics and maybe the other half of this newest *CBA* will change my mind. Two things on the Toth stuff. One, I wish someone could ask him where his story "39/74" was originally meant to appear (when it has been printed in *witzend* #10 and the second Mañuel Auad volume, it's copyrighted to Marvel Comics, as noted in the checklist you print). Two, there is an item missing from said checklist, under DC Comics: *Wonder Woman Gallery* from 1996. It's a great full-page cartoon of Wonder Woman holding off a bunch of armed gunsels by waving her finger admonishingly at them and saying "tsk, tsk, tsk... bad boys... no, no, no ... mama spank" and a caption reading "You just know she will—but will they heed her in time? Silly twits! Wonder Woman knows best—doesn't she?"

Keep up the good work. I am a subscriber and I buy an extra copy off the local newsstand! Also, in your upcoming Charlton issue, please do try to find out who wrote under some of the following pseudonyms: Tom Tuna, Jack Daniels, and Norm DiPluhm (it's not Dennis O'Neil or Steve Skeates or Mary Skrenes, according to Skeates). And print as much beautiful Tom Sutton stuff as possible!

Jim Wells
Avondale Estates, Georgia

As to the Alex Toth checklist, I can't thank you enough for focusing on this legendary artist. I had thought of sending you a photocopy of my *Roy Rogers* newspaper strip that he ghosted, dated Dec. 30, 1960, but it's not a particularly great example of his work. Doesn't have the "pop" that most of his work does. Maybe someone else inked it, I'm not sure. In any case, at least that date can be pinned down for the period when he was ghosting the strip.

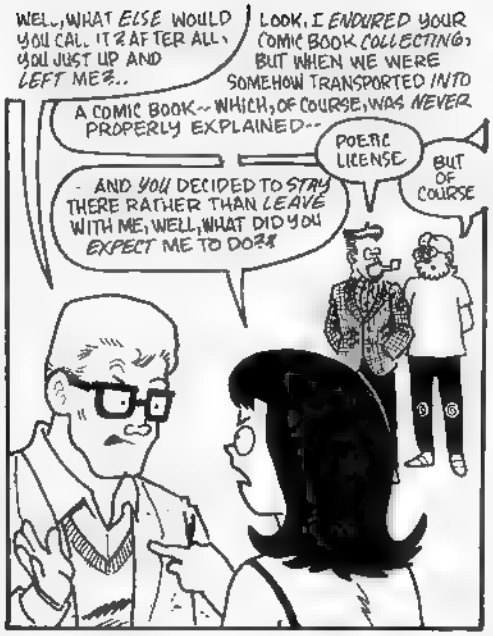
And as for the *Maverick* work, I believe Alex may have done illustrations for at least one title in the series, maybe *The Real McCoys*, although I can't find my copy at the moment to be sure. I had the *Maverick* book for a while so I've been on the lookout for some time to see if he worked on other books in the series. There's at least one similar title (*The Buccaneer?*) with interior work by Russ Manning.

Keep up the great work. *CBA* is the best comic-related magazine on the market, in my view. By far.

[*No space for proper responses here but suffice to say thanks to all who write letters. It's truly gratifying to receive such a constant stream of support. I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank everybody who answered my request for back issues of* Amazing Heroes, Comics Interviews, *etc. Your generosity has been overwhelming! Thanks to all—and I promise to put 'em to good use!*—**JBC**]

Backlinc:0!!!? by Fred Hembeck

HI, FOLKS! JOINING ME TODAY ARE CHARLIE DROOPLE, HIS GIRL DOROTHY CARSON, AND THE MAN WHOSE BOOK, THE MANY GHOSTS OF DR. GRAVES, INTRODUCED THIS CHARMING COUPLE TO US BACK IN 1967, DR. M.T. GRAVES HIMSELF!
TO BE PRECISE, IT WAS MY FIFTH ISSUE THAT FEATURED THE SAGA OF THESE ILL FATED LOVEBIRDS, "THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS", ONE OF STEVE SKEATES MOST IMAGINATIVE SCRIPTS AND ONE OF JIM APARO'S MOST MEMORABLE ART JOBS.
~"ILL-FATED"?..

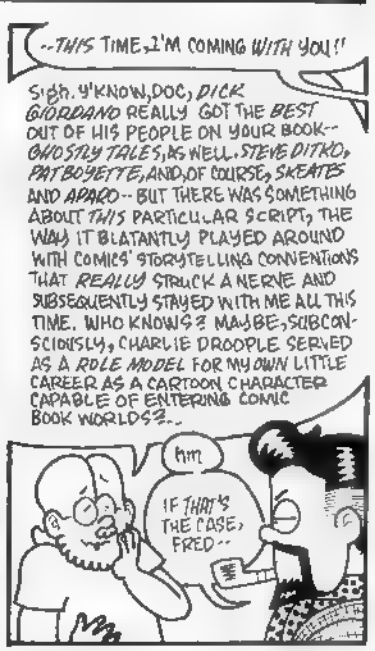

WELL, WHAT ELSE WOULD YOU CAL. IT? AFTER ALL, YOU JUST UP AND LEFT ME?..
LOOK, I ENDURED YOUR COMIC BOOK COLLECTING, BUT WHEN WE WERE SOMEHOW TRANSPORTED INTO A COMIC BOOK--WHICH, OF COURSE, WAS NEVER PROPERLY EXPLAINED--
POETIC LICENSE
BUT OF COURSE
--AND YOU DECIDED TO STAY THERE RATHER THAN LEAVE WITH ME; WELL, WHAT DID YOU EXPECT ME TO DO?!

MAYBE I LIKED IT BETTER THERE. MAYBE EVERYTHING THERE WAS MORE VIBRANT, MORE COLORFUL, MORE--MORE..
MORE UNREAL? huh? WITH GIANT QUESTION MARKS FLOATING IN THE AIR, PANEL BORDERS TRAPPING US FIRMLY IN PLACE, AND, oh YEAH, INSIDE COMMENTARY HOVERING OVER OUR HEADS IN THE CAPTIONS?!
NICE TOUCH.
THANKS. WRITERS LOVE THAT SORT OF POWER.

LET'S NOT FORGET ABOUT ME!
AGH--THAT STRANGE POLICEMAN AGAIN!?
AND PLEASE NOTE READERS, THIS FELLOW APPEARED YEARS BEFORE HOWARD THE DUCK!
TO BE FAIR, FRED, HE WAS ONLY IN TWO PANELS...

AND THIS TIME, ONLY ONE...
Oh, GREAT--NOT THAT ANNOYING NARRATION AGAIN?!...
heh
REMEMBER THAT SEQUENCE WHERE YOU GOT SO FRUSTRATED YOU ATTEMPTED TO BURN UP THE COMIC BY TAKING OUT A BOOK OF MATCHES AND STRIKING ONE? REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED AND WHAT THE CAPTION IN THE VERY NEXT PANEL SAID? REMEMBER?

ALLOW ME TO REFRESH YOUR MEMORY--AND SHOW YOU AS WELL: "SUDDENLY, THERE IS A (HEH HEH) BRIEF SHOWER..."
THAT IS IT! I AM SO GONE! I LIVE YOUR LIFE IN A COMIC BOOK, CHARLIE DROOPLE, BUT YOU LIVE IT WITHOUT ME!
NO, DOROTHY--WAIT! I WAS WRONG TO LET YOU LEAVE WITHOUT ME LAST TIME--
NICE
I REMEMBERED, TOO


--THIS TIME, I'M COMING WITH YOU!"
Sigh. Y'KNOW, DOC, DICK GIORDANO REALLY GOT THE BEST OUT OF HIS PEOPLE ON YOUR BOOK--GHOSTLY TALES, AS WELL. STEVE DITKO, PAT BOYETTE, AND, OF COURSE, SKEATES AND APARO--BUT THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT THIS PARTICULAR SCRIPT, THE WAY IT BLATANTLY PLAYED AROUND WITH COMICS' STORYTELLING CONVENTIONS THAT REALLY STRUCK A NERVE AND SUBSEQUENTLY STAYED WITH ME ALL THIS TIME. WHO KNOWS? MAYBE, SUBCONSCIOUSLY, CHARLIE DROOPLE SERVED AS A ROLE MODEL FOR MY OWN LITTLE CAREER AS A CARTOON CHARACTER CAPABLE OF ENTERING COMIC BOOK WORLDS?..
hm
IF THAT'S THE CASE, FRED--

--YOU NEED TO SEE THE DOCTOR OVER IN E.C.'S PSYCHOANALYSIS, NOT ME. YOU'RE AS SICK A CASE AS CHARLIE IS--OR WAS, UNTIL HE CAME TO HIS SENSES!
huh?

LOOK AT YOURSELF. HAVING A SERIOUS CONVERSATION WITH A GOATEED FICTIONAL CONSTRUCT WHOSE BIGGEST CLAIMS TO FAME ARE A PIPE, A POLKA-DOTTED ASCOT, A CRINGE-INDUCING NAME, AND A PENCHANT FOR SHARING H.G. BARBAN-BASEMENT ROD SERLING IMPRESSION WITH ANYBODY WHO'LL LISTEN! GET REAL, SON, BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE.

WELL, WELL, WELL, LOOK WHO'S BACK?..
Y'KNOW BUDDY, A LOTTA PEOPLE DON'T BELIEVE ME, BUT I SWEAR IT'S TRUE. I KNOW IT'S AN ODD COINCIDENCE, BUT MY NAME HAPPENS TO BE HOWARD, TOO. HOWARD THE MOUSE--OR HOWARD THE MOUSE COP, IF YOU PREFER.

Geez, IF I'D ONLY GOTTEN THE CHANCE THAT FOWL FELLA DID, I COULDA BEEN JUST AS BIG--BIGGER EVEN! PEOPLE LIKE MICE A LOT MORE THAN DUCKS, I TELL YA. JUST LOOK AT THE BOX OFFICE RECEIPTS OF FANTASIA UP AGAINST THAT QUACK'S FILM.
MAYBE..
MAYBE I DO NEED HELP...
AND CHARLTON ALREADY HAD SOME SUCCESS WITH ATOMIC MOUSE!? I WAS A SMIF NATURAL!

CHARLIE! DOROTHY! M.T.! WAIT FOR ME!!
BACK TO LIMBO MOUSE SORRY.
sigh
WELL, I MAY NOT BE SPENDING MY TIMELESS TIME WITH BEVERLY SWITZLER, BUT WITH MISS BIKINI LUV WAITING FOR ME I'M ONE LUCKY RODENT!
WOOF WOOF..

©2001 Fred Hembeck. All characters ©2001 their respective owners. Be sure to check out Fred's weekly strip in The Comic Buyers' Guide

Charlton Comics: 1973

A snapshot of the Derby, Connecticut publisher

by Jud Hurd

The following article, a perfect contextual piece describing the Derby, Connecticut publishing house in the 1970s, appeared in the Dec. 1973 issue of CARTOONIST PROfiles *(#20), Jud Hurd's delightful magazine devoted primarily to comic strip artists. Still going strong after 32 years of publishing, current issues of the magazine should be available from Jud, so those interested should contact the CP editor at 281 Bayberry Lane, Westport, CT 06880. My thanks to Rocco Nigro who loaned ye ed a copy of the mag, and special thanks to Jud for his kind permission to reprint the article, and my wishes to Mr. Hurd for many more years publishing this superb periodical! ©2001 Jud Hurd. Used with permission.—***JBC.***

Above: *Cover to* CARTOONIST PROfiles *#20, featuring Jud Hurd's coverage of '70s Charlton, reprinted here. Note the cover photo (by Paula Hopper) of Charlton Comics editor George Wildman's innovative use of tractor trailers as billboards for the comics publisher. For those of you without super-microscopic vision, here's the text of the caption: "One of the mammoth tractor trailers in which comic books produced by Charlton Publications of Derby, Connecticut are delivered to distributors in the United States and Canada. The traveling cartoons of Popeye, The Phantom, Blondie and Dagwood, and Beetle Bailey, are advertising the fact that Charlton produces the comic books featuring these famous King Features characters. In this issue, you'll find the story of this unique company which performs all of the steps involved in the production of 40 comic book titles, plus magazines, coloring books, etc., under one huge roof." ©2001 CARTOONIST PROfiles. Used with permission. Characters ©2001 King Features Syndicate.*

To those who have often visited the offices of major newspaper syndicates, national magazines, and comic book publishers, a trip to the headquarters of Charlton Publications in Derby, Connecticut, is a startling eye-opener! Writers, editors, artists, typists, etc., were much in evidence, of course, during these previous office visits, but the rest of the steps involved in publishing were absent. However, at Charlton all of the steps, from the conception of an idea for one of their 40 comic books to the departure of that book in a huge tractor-trailer from the Charlton loading-dock, are performed under one gigantic roof! The company was founded by John Santangelo, Sr., Ronald Scott is its General Manager, and John Santangelo, Jr. is the Charlton Publisher. In addition to the visual impact of all this, the visitor soon becomes aware of the advantages of such a set-up. For one thing, everything proceeds more smoothly when editor knows printer, artist knows engraver, color separator knows writer, etc. For instance, if something is off-register in one of the books, the presses can be stopped and the situation corrected immediately. Your editor had the following conversation with George Wildman, the editor of the comic book division, with Nicola Cuti, the assistant comics editor, and with Joe Gill, the chief staff writer at Charlton. The photos accompanying this talk will give our readers a good idea of the size and scope of this operation. In addition to its big line of comic books, Charlton also has a magazine publishing division, puts out preschool children's coloring books, and has projected plans with a number of corporations to furnish specialized comic books as a vehicle to convey whatever messages these corporations have in mind.

As is noted in this conversation, General Manager Ronald Scott emphasizes what he considers the most important feature of Charlton operations: "We attempt to establish an environment in which creative people can function comfortably." All cartoonists realize the great importance of this.

Jud Hurd: *In the past half dozen years Charlton Publications has really been booming. Would you give us a brief rundown, George, on the background of the company?*

George Wildman: Sure. Basically, when the company was founded by John Santangelo, Sr. in the early '40s, we produced music and song sheets and it wasn't till 1964 that Charlton got into the comics field. To begin with the company bought many daily comics from the syndicates, cut them up and published them in comic book form. Operations continued in this piecemeal fashion until about 1955 when Charlton began to staff a comic department. From then till 1967 this staff produced our own titles and we had no nationally-known comic properties. Some of the art was freelanced, a comics editor was appointed, and we grew.

But 1968 proved to be the big year that really got us going in the comics field. This was when we acquired the exclusive license to produce the comic books featuring four of the big-name King Features characters—*Blondie, Beetle Bailey, Popeye,* and *The Phantom!* On top of this coup, in 1969 we also landed the rights to produce the comic books featuring the Hanna-Barbera characters from the Screen Gems organization—*The Flintstones, Yogi Bear, Top Cat, The Jetsons, Huckleberry Hound,* etc. Screen Gems, incidentally, handles all of the merchandising of the Hanna-Barbera creations. These acquisitions opened a lot of distributors' doors for us. You know that when a salesman for a comic book publisher arrives in a town and approaches a big magazine distributor, that distributor is primarily interested in whether the salesman has some titles in his line that will really sell on the newsstands and in other outlets. Happily, in 1968, many of these distributors' doors suddenly swung open to us—doors that had previously been closed to our salesmen who, up to that point, hadn't been able to offer any nationally-known characters and books. These new comic acquisitions, along with our own standard material, which we had been producing continuously since 1955, gave us one helluva package!

Jud: *Referring back for a moment to distributors, the little candy store, with its rack of comic books, isn't as much of a factor in sell-*

Above: *Repro'd as a full page in* CARTOONIST PROfiles *#20, a sampling of Charlton's comic book output. Photo by Paula Hopper. ©2001 CARTOONIST PROfiles. Titles ©2001 the respective copyright holders. Used with the permission of Jud Hurd and CARTOONIST PROfiles.*

ing them as it was in the years past, is it?

George: Right. Nowadays our principal efforts are made in the direction of getting Charlton books into supermarkets and chain stores of various kinds. An ideal outlet is the more-and-more common 'Family Reading Center' in a supermarket where, for instance, we offer four comic books prepackaged in a plastic envelope. This would be in a store area where women's magazines, outdoor publications, hardback children's books, news magazines, as well as our comic books, are sold.

Jud: *How many comic books does Charlton produce in a year?*

George: I think about 70,000,000.

Jud: *I know that Charlton Publications has two divisions—magazine and comics—with Sal Gentile as editor of magazines and you as editor of comics. How did you happen to become comic book editor with 40 books under your control?*

George: I'd been doing the penciling and inking of a lot of the Charlton titles on a freelance basis for about five years during the middle '50s—*Atomic Mouse, Atomic Cat*, etc. At this same time I had formed my own little advertising agency and finally this ad business grew to the extent that I dropped my freelance comic work. Sal Gentile had been a staff artist here during the period I was freelancing for Charlton, and by 1967 he had become comic book editor. It so happened that when Charlton acquired the license to do the comic books featuring the King Features characters, Sal, remembering my work in years past, asked if I'd be interested in coming here to work permanently. I was interested and one of the big inducements was that I would be able to draw the Popeye comic book in addition to assisting Sal in editing and producing comic books. You see I'd copied and drawn Popeye since I was knee-high to a grasshopper. Incidentally, in 1971, Sal became editor of the magazine division and I became comics editor.

In drawing the Popeye comic books I'm constantly in touch with Bud Sagendorf who does the syndicated newspaper version of *Popeye*, and who was for a number of years assistant to E.C. Segar, the creator of the feature. I check with him regularly on matters pertaining to the history of the strip, points of drawing, color, etc., and he's been most generous with that help. I figure that this is the master—what better place can you go! I collaborate with Joe Gill, our chief staff writer, on the *Popeye* scripts, and I'm sure Joe will have some things to say about the business a little later.

Jud: *I notice that Charlton often comes out with a comic book featuring the characters in a new TV show, just about the time that the program makes its fall debut. How do you manage that?*

George: We're invited down to various agencies in New York each spring, let's say, to review some of the upcoming TV shows intended for the following autumn. This was the case with *The Partridge Family* book and with the spin-off we produced, *David Cassidy*. The producers of these TV shows are naturally anxious to have comics publishers do books featuring the shows' characters, so we get lots of cooperation and material from them: photos front view, profile, full-figure shots, etc. We write our own stories for these books, I might add.

Before we leave the subject of Popeye, I want to mention that we're excited about the fact we're printing 15 *Popeye Specials* which King Features is publishing. As far as I know, these books—each of which shows Popeye learning about one of 15 different occupations covered in the series—are the first in the educational field to incorporate a nationally-known comics character.

These comic textbooks are sold as a package to school districts and boards of education and are given to the kids. They're pitched to children at the fourth-grade level but they've been found to be helpful too in homes where the father may have had only a sixth-grade education, let's say. The parent himself sometimes learns through these books the kids bring home, of many job possibilities for himself that he wasn't even aware of.

Jud: *What categories of comics does Charlton produce?*

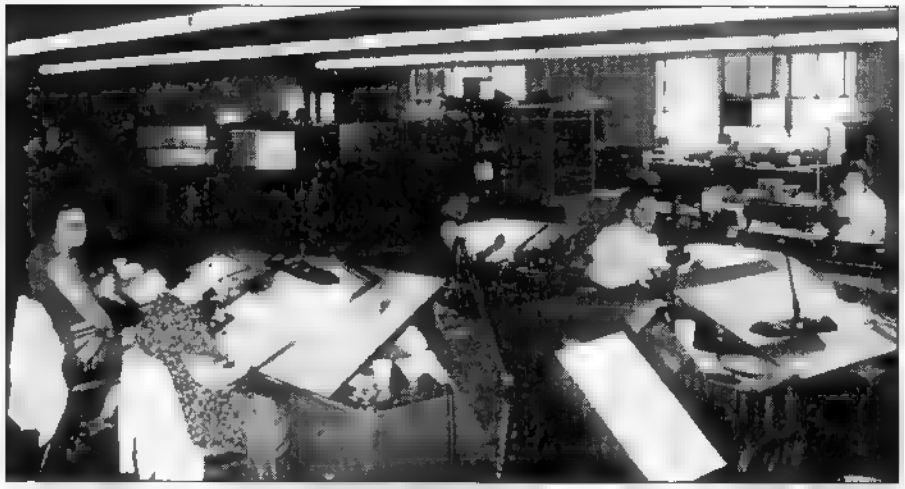
George: Seven of them—adventure, animated, ghost, romance, Western, armed services, and teenage books.

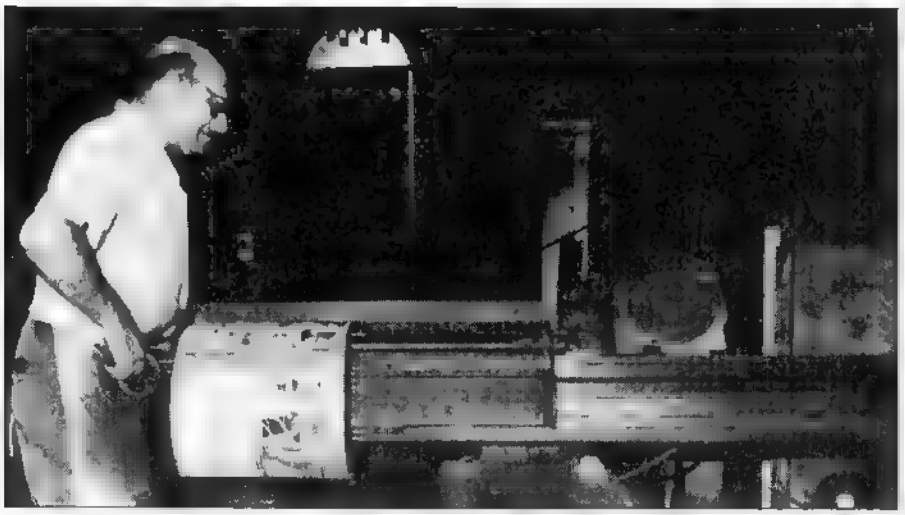
Jud: *Your huge plant, with all operations under one roof, is most impressive. Would you mention briefly the various steps involved in the production of one of your books?*

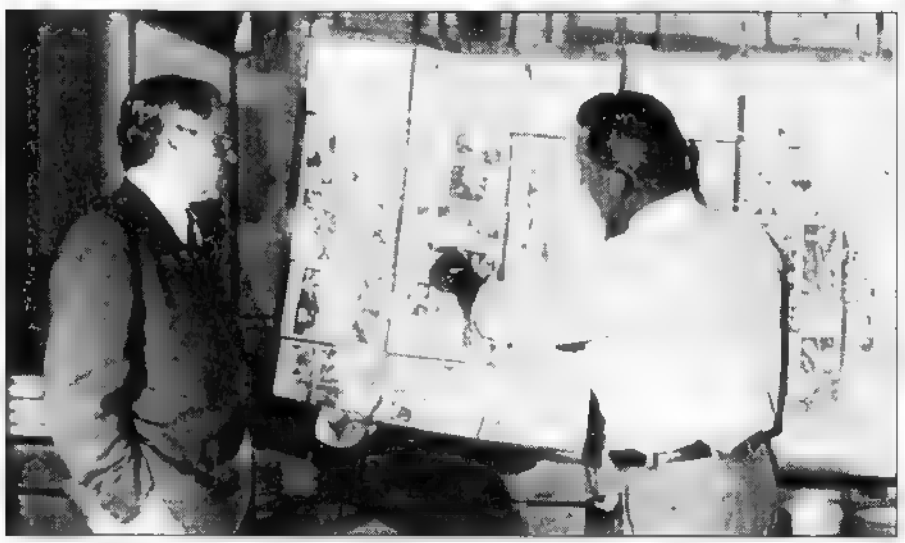
George: First of all, most of our 40 books are bi-monthlies—six books a year, and I always work two months ahead on each one. We do buy scripts from freelance writers but in many cases I will assign the writing of a book to Joe Gill, our chief staff writer here. I may want three stories for a particular book and Joe, with his amazing versatility, will sit down and produce the scripts. I'll then review them and send the story to one of our freelance artists with the deadline noted. When the finishes are returned to us, the artwork is picked up by a messenger service which twice-a-week takes our material in to the Comics Code office in New York, where it's thoroughly checked for spelling and grammar, adherence to the various requirements of the Code, etc. If any changes are suggested, our two staff artists here make them. We even have our own proofreaders who double-check everything. Before we print a book every page of art work is

Top: *The powers that were. The Charlton Comics editorial staff from left, assistant editor Nick Cuti managing editor George Wildman, and chief staff writer Joe Gill looking busy while posing for photographer Paula Hopper from CARTOONIST PROfiles #20. Dig Cuti's crazy '70s hair do, man! Reprinted with the kind permission of CP. ©2001 CARTOONIST PROfiles.*

Above: *A Wildman innovation. Charlton finally sports a brand identity with a new logo designed by the managing editor.*







Above and next page: *Paula Hopper's photo essay on the all-in-one Charlton operation, as seen in CARTOON ST PROfiles #20.* **Top:** *The color separation department headed by Helen Popowski (far right).* **Middle:** *Valentino Police trimming plate to be used on the Goss Headliner press which prints the comic interiors.* **Bottom:** *CP editor Jud Hurd looks on while editor George Widman checks silverprints from which the women will do color separations. ©2001 CARTOONIST PROfiles. Used with permission.*

stamped "Approved" by the Code. Nick Cuti, our assistant comics editor, is the last to see a book before it goes to the engraving department. He wants to be sure that all changes, corrections, etc. have been completed.

Next, a set of silverprint proofs are sent to a freelance colorist who indicates with dyes just how each page will be colored. His guides come back soon to the girls in our color-separation department. They have received quick-proofs of each of the pages from the engraving department. These will be the key plates and will be printed in our books in black. Next, on an acetate overlay, one of the girls will paint in (in black) all of the areas which the colorist has indicated should be on the red plate. Another overlay will then be prepared showing all of the parts of the page which should be on the yellow plate. And, finally, the same is true for the blue plate. These proofs with the overlays attached, then go back to engraving where they are etched on metal plates. After the books are printed, they're automatically stitched and clipped, boxed, and then they go into our distribution network.

Jud: *I know that Nick Cuti and Joe Gill have some interesting thoughts about this craft. Could we get them in on the discussion?*

Joe Gill: Anyone aspiring to be a writer should have read a great deal because he learns a great deal from other writers. Of course comics offer a particular problem since you have to freeze segments of your action in frames.

Nick Cuti: I agree. A young writer should saturate himself with as many stories as possible, not only from reading but also from TV, movies—anywhere he can soak up plots. Eventually he'll have so many plots running around in his head that when he needs one, he'll be able to recall an old plot, fix it up, put a new twist on it, and write a story. A lot of what he reads and sees will be junk but even that helps. The young writer can figure that if they had done it a different way, they would have turned out a better story.

Jud: *Some comic book publishers are doing books that get into the drug problem, and other related activities. Is Charlton tending in this direction at all?*

Joe: No, we stay away from everything in this line, except that we may make an incidental quick reference when it's necessary for a particular story. For instance, we might have a girl who's shown at a party with a new group of young folks. She notices that some of the people have funny eyes or that they're taking pills. She doesn't want any part of this group and wants out. That's all there is to it—we just brush the subject and don't go into any details as to how the party started, etc.

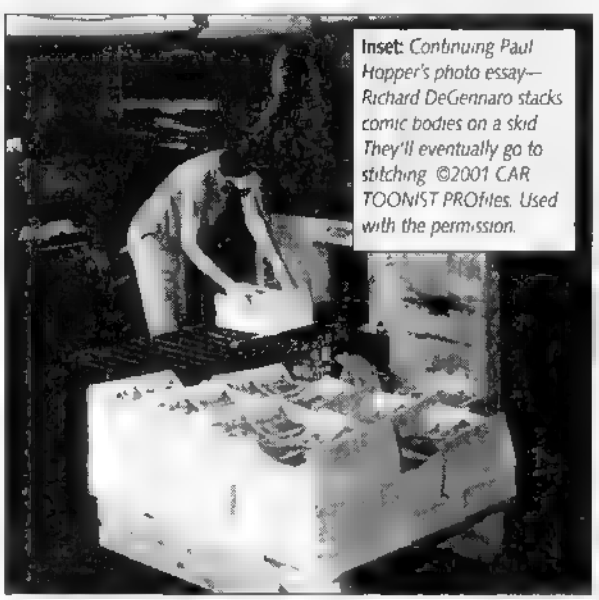
Nick: I've felt that the first job we have is to entertain. Relevance about many of the issues of the day is fine, but if you force a story to be relevant, you're likely to destroy the entertainment value.

Jud: *How would you advise young people who want to get into this field?*

Nick: The best manuals on how to write for comic books are the books themselves. The kids should look at them, see how many panels there are on a page—how many words, whether big or small balloons are used, how the action is broken up with the high points being emphasized, etc. In this connection, Charlton currently has a special offer which includes with each subscription, among other things, a 32-page *Comic Book Guide for the Artist, Writer, and Letterer*. This includes much valuable information for the neophyte. Your readers can find this offer written about in any one of our current books, and I urge them to look for it.

Jud: *Do you tend to do stories which the comic book fans indicate to you that they'd like to see?*

Nick: The fans are great but the danger there is that they're too sophisticated about comics. They've read so many that they're tired of the same old art work, the same old plots, and they want something very different. If we catered to them, we'd be cutting off the



Inset: *Continuing Paul Hopper's photo essay—Richard DeGennaro stacks comic bodies on a skid. They'll eventually go to stitching. ©2001 CARTOONIST PROfiles. Used with the permission.*

huge number of readers who are our bread and butter. What the fans like generally doesn't prove to be a financial success.

Joe: As an example of this, Charlton produced the *Blue Beetle* books some years back, and we still get regular requests for them, and questions about them—more than for any other of our books. They stirred up enormous fan interest but weren't a financial success and we gave them up.

Jud: *George, do you pay as high a price for the comic book material you buy as several of the New York City publishers do?*

George: No, but let me be quick to preface that word by quoting our General Manager, Ronald Scott, as follows: "We attempt to establish an environment in which creative people can function comfortably." You see, Jud, I'm one ed tor (as my predecessors were) who's handling a whole line (40) of comics so I can't sit here all day and think about just one book. I'm not spend ng my time say ng, "What are we going to do on page three?" or "What's the message in this panel?" We give our artists a free hand. I send them a script and tell them, "Give me back a story that's going to be good for our books, our company, and our aud ence." This is the relationship we have with our artists and they are very happy. They may not be getting the rate they could in New York but most of them are very dedicated people—they're willing to work for less if they can be left alone. I don't stifle their talent by putting the fritz on everything they do, and I don't keep beating them over the head. I ask you—why, for instance, do talents the field's most adm red artists, work for us with other comic publishers after them? Even with the somewhat higher rates paid in New York, the artist has to allow for conference time, hours spent on changes, revisions, corrections, etc., and in the end he's no better off financia ly.

I'd ike to add one thing about the efforts young people make to get into comic book work. I get so many letters wh ch merely say, "Do you need me?" Without samples, the applicant just gets a form letter back saying, "Try someone else." A prerequisite is to send us samples of his or her work, whether they be Xeroxes, photostats, or originals. When I see these samples, I try to write the appl cants to help direct them, if they seem to need more schooling or experience or of course the samples may indicate that they're ready to produce some material for us.

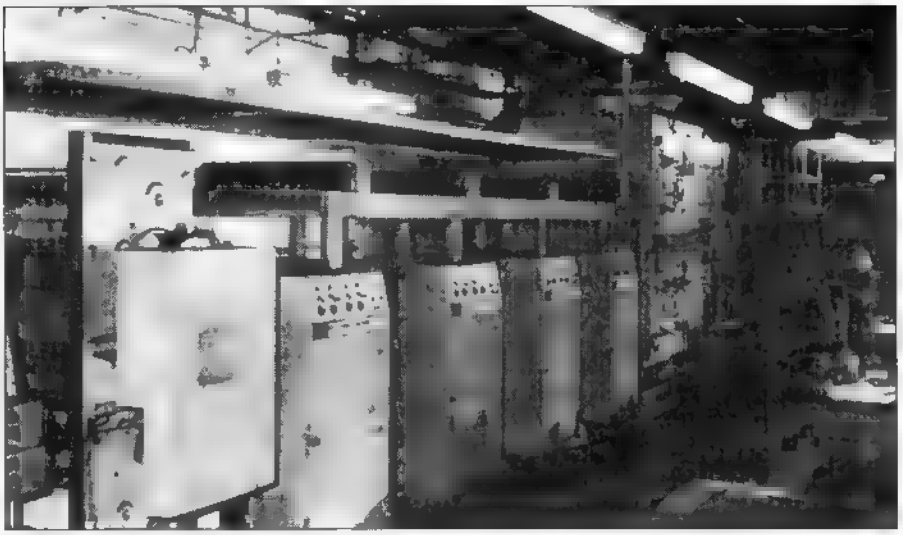
Jud: *I understand that Charlton is getting back into the super hero field and that you, Joe, are writing Yang, a book which follows the success of the Kung Fu TV show.*

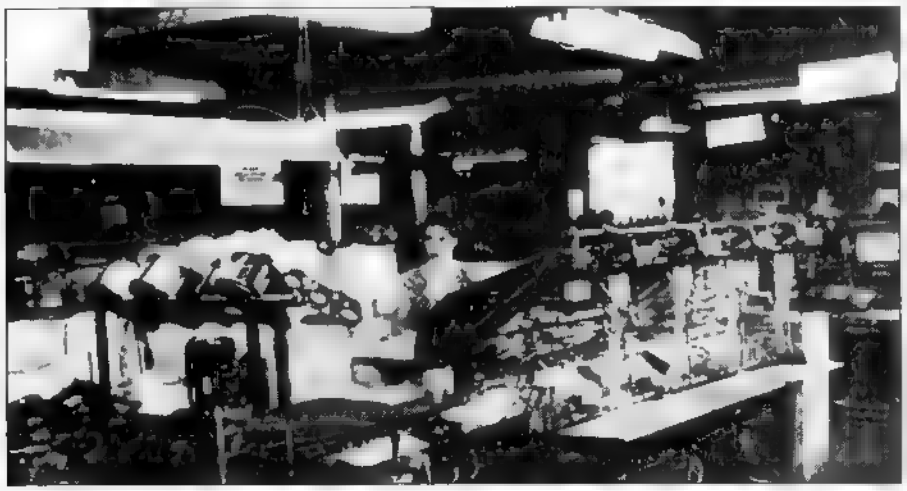
Joe: That's right and Warren Sattler will be doing the draw ng.

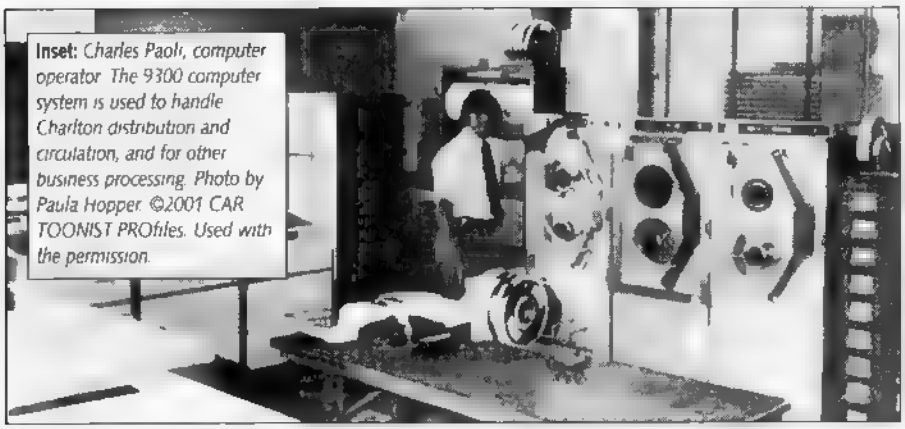
Jud: *And, Nick, will you tell our readers something about the new E-Man character you created, and about the scripts you'll be writing for the feature?*

Nick: E-Man is pure energy and thus can change himself into any form of energy or matter. He likes to sleep in car batteries and he travels along telephone lines. On the front of his costume is E nstein's formula for changing matter into energy and vice versa. Contemporary humor is a strong ingredient in the book.

George: And it's a far cry from the simplistic adventures of some of the early super heroes of the 1930s. Incidentally, Joe Staton will be doing the drawings. We're expecting big things from the book.







Inset: *Charles Paoli, computer operator. The 9300 computer system is used to handle Charlton distribution and circulation, and for other business processing. Photo by Paula Hopper. ©2001 CARTOONIST PROfiles. Used with the permission.*

Continuing Paul Hopper's photo essay. **Top right:** *The four-color, high-speed Cottrell Model V702 offset press which prints comic book covers. This press is the first of its type in the U.S.* **Above right:** *Frank Tuccio, pressman (left), checking comic book covers with editor George Wildman.* **Left top:** *Juliette Tremblay operating a stitching machine where the comic book interiors meet the covers. They are folded, stitched together, and trimmed. ©2001 CARTOONIST PROfiles. Used with the permission. Paula's wonderful photo essay from CP continues in George Wildman's interview following.*

Alex Toth—'Before I Forget'

The master of sequential art on his Charlton contributions

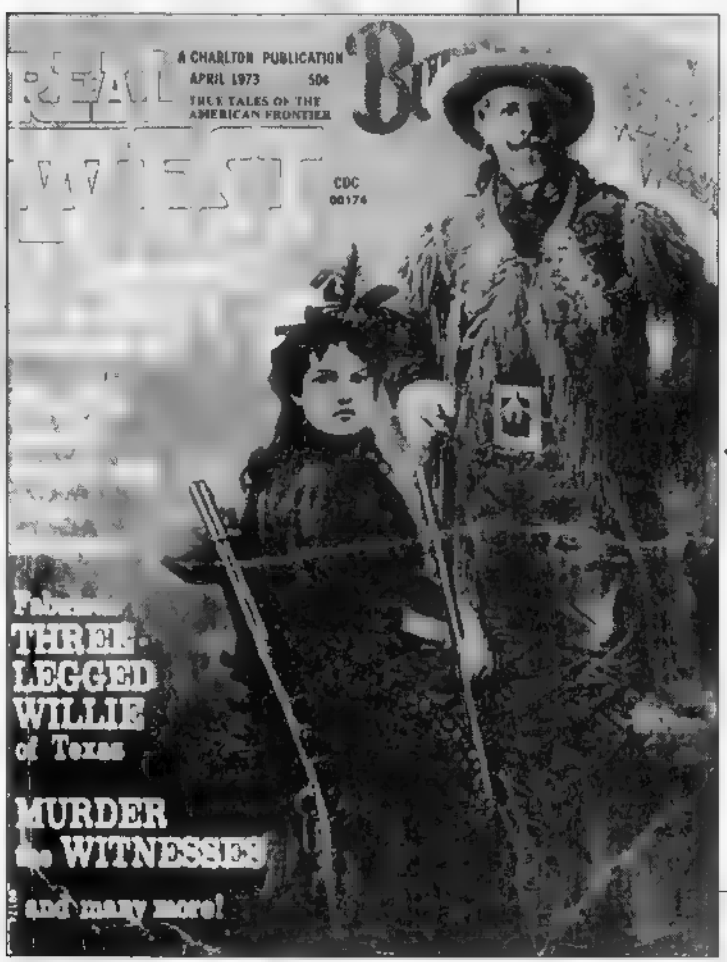
Background image: *Cover detail of Charlton's Real West, Dec. 1972 by Alex Toth. Courtesy of David A. Roach & F. San Millan. ©2001 the respective copyright holder*

12 JAN 01 · ABOUT 'CHARLTON': CAN'T RECALL THE ORDER OF EVENTS THEN OR NAMES / EXACTLY — TOO LONG AGO — SO, CORRECT AS NEEDED —

ANYHOO, SHORT STORY VERSION: SAL GENTILE / A DEAR MAN / EDITOR OF THE WESTERN PULP MONTHLY, ASKED IF I'D WORK UP A COVER FOR IT — a FULL COLOR COVER — I WAS HAPPY TO TRY — and DID — IN MIXED MEDIA, I DID — ENJOYED IT VERY MUCH — HAD REASONABLE SUCCESS WITH IT — SO I DID a SECOND — LIKED ITS FINISH MORE — BOTH WERE FOTOSOURCED, VIA GRUNGY OLD IMAGES OF THE ACTUAL 1800s' WESTERN PERSONAS, POOR FOTOS, MY ONLY LINK, I DID MY BEST, WITH COLORED INKS and MARKERS and PENCILS, and HIGHLIGHTING / DARKENING PENS / PENCILS / CRAYONS / etc — BUT HAD A BAD ACCIDENT WITH MY SECOND COVER PAINTING, THE 'WILD BILL CODY / CALAMITY JANE' DUAL PORTRAITS PIECE — A DISASTER —

I'D PAINTED W/ COLORED INKS ('PELIKAN'), ON HEAVY, and I MEAN HEAVY; 'WHATMAN' BOARD — WHICH, DUE TO A LOT OF WET WASHES, WARPED, I FREQUENTLY, AT WORK ON IT, WOULD TRY TO DEWARP IT WITH REVERSE-BENDINGS, FOR ONLY TEMP. RESULTS — EACH DAY'S END WOULD SEE THAT DAMN ILLO BOARD AS CURVED AS THE ROOF OF a '49 CHEVY'!!! DAMN IT! ANYHOO, I THOUGHT I WAS DONE WITH MY NERVOUS NELLIE BACK-N'-FILL PAINTING, WET-IN-WET, STYLE, etc — BUT NO — MY SEPIA-BIASED COLOR PORTRAIT OF CODY / JANE, TO REFLECT THE LOOK OF an OLD FADED / AGED / BROWNED TINTYPE OF THE PERIOD, etc, HAD ANOTHER STEP AHEAD OF IT, FOR ME TO STUMBLE OVER — PAINFUL — SUMMED-UP WITH A SOUND-WORD KRAK !!! YUP — IN DEWARPING THE FINISH, THE THICK ILLO BOARD SHOWED ME WHO'S BOSS! A HUGE DIAGONAL RAGGED CRACK, THRU TO BACKBOARD'S LAST LAYERING, JUST EXPLODED, BISECTING THE WORK — OHH, GAWWWDDD, WHAT DO I DO NOW?!? IRREPARABLY-CRACKED, NO BLOODY WAY COULD I HIDE IT WITH MY CHOSEN TRANSPARENT PAINTING MEDIUM — NO — I WAS UP THE CREEK — MY OLD NEIGHBORHOOD — BUT, THEN, IN DESPARATION A FLASH OF INSANE INSPIRED RESOLUTION, IN PANIC, I SAID — "YESSS! YESSS!" I'D TURN LEMONS INTO LEMONADE; DEFEAT INTO VICTORY (WELLLL, COMPROMISE, ANYWAY) — and, YES, I, DELIBERATE, WITH INTENT, a DO-OR-DIE / WOT'N'HELL / BRAVADO, CRACKED TWO OTHER WELL-PLACED CRACKS THRU IT — YUP !!!

Below: *Courtesy of French reader (and Toth expert) F. San Millan here's Alex's April 1973 Real West cover — described in his column. ©2001 the respective copyright holder*



2/ WHICH NOW HAD THE BOARD KINKED, UP N' DOWN, LIKE A MILE OF BAD ROAD; IT NEEDING FLATTENING-OUT — FOR WHATEVER DUBIOUS REPAIR-WORK I'D DO — I PRESSED IT DOWN AS BEST I COULD — and KNEW I'D COLOR THE CRACKS, SO TO ADD TO THE LOOK OF AN OLD PHOTO, WEATHERED, CRACKED (AND NOW!!!), STAINED / DISCOLORED / OR WHITE / ALONG THE NAKED CRACKLINES / RAGGED AS THEY WERE — IT WORKED! IT 'LOOKED RIGHT' — I HAD TO GLUE IT / TAPE IT / TO A HEAVY BACKING BOARD FOR DISPATCH 3000 MILES TO DERBY / CT — SAL GENTILE / CHARLTON, INC — IN SAFETY — VIA THE USPS!

SAL PHONED TO SAY IT WAS FINE; CHECK WAS IN THE MAIL, etc, and ASKED ABOUT SAID CRACKS — I TOLD HIM — HE CHUCKLED IN DISMAY — SAYING, WHAT I WAS ABOUT TO ASHCAN; and START OVER, IN DISGUST — YUP — A WILD HAIR IDEA SAVED IT; and MY SKIN!!!

HAPPY ACCIDENT? YOUUUUBETCHA!!!

IT ONLY ADDED TO THE OVERALL 'AGED-LOOK' I WANTED FROM THE START; THO' I'D NOT EVER THOUGHT OF PAINTING-IN CRACKS! NO; FATE STEPPED-IN and TOOK CARE OF THAT FOR ME; POINTING ME IN THE RIGHT-ONDY — DIRECTION — LEFT OPEN TO ME, REALLY! GOD TAPPED ME ON MY THICK HUNGARIAN HEAD and I SAW THE LIGHT, JUST IN TIME; DEADLINE-TIME HOT ON MY NECK, and ALL — IT WAS SO GOOD TO HEAR SAL GENTILE COMMEND THE WORK — AFTER ALL THE TRAUMA HERE!

A TRIO OF YOUNG KID EDITORS / WRITERS / ARTISTS FROM THE 'CHARLTON BULLSEYE' MAG ASKED ME TO DRAW A DITKO-CREATION STORY — OF THE QUESTION' — FOR VERY LOW FEE / PAGE RATES, TOO, AS WAS THE RULE THERE THEN — I BELIEVE BILL PEARSON, CHARLIE ROBERTS, WERE TWO OF 'EM — (CANNOT RECALL NAME OF THE THIRD; SORRY — WAS IT 'KEN' — SOMEBODY?) ANYHOO, IT MAY'VE BEEN A JOE GILL SCRIPT — IT WAS PRETTY GOOD — SO, SURE, I'LL DO MY TAKE ON DITKO-STYLED HERO 'THE QUESTION' — and DID SO — LETTERING, THE WORKS — and A COVER, TOO — IT WAS FUN WORKING WITH THE YOUNG WILDCATTERS — THE JOB TURNED-OUT WELL — WE ENJOYED IT ALL —

GEORGE WILDMAN SENT ME A ROMANCE SCRIPT — WHICH, FOR SOME REASON, UPON DRAWING IT OUT, LETTERED, TOO, I BELIEVE (?) CHOSE TO INK 'BRUSH-ONLY' — BUT VERY HEAVY-HANDEDLY — BADLY — REALLY LOUSY — EVEN THE TITLE LOGO — AN AWFUL WORMY / UGLY LOOKY SCRAWL — A TOTAL FAILURE ON MY PART —

NICK CUTI'S 'BOOKWORM' 5 PAGER (?) WAS NEXT — I HAD A GOOD TIME WITH IT — BRUSH / MARKER-INKED — IT WENT NICELY — IT WOULD BE PAYBACK / APOLOGIA / FOR WHAT AWFUL MESSY ROMANCE SET, I HOPED — BUT, WILDMAN and I GOT INTO SOME DISPUTE OVER THE PHONE / LETTERS, TOO, MEBBE — SO, THE 'BOOKWORM' STORY-SET DONE, READY TO WRAP, DIDN'T TRAVEL — I RETURNED THE CUTI SCRIPT TO GEORGE, SAID 'SORRY' / 'SAYONARA' and IT WAS REASSIGNED TO A 'CHARLTON REGULAR' / PUBLISHED —

WHEN TERESA WEBB WAS SEVENTEEN, SHE SUDDENLY BLOSSOMED INTO THE INCREDIBLE BEAUTY THE REST OF THE WORLD CAME TO KNOW AS — I WAS HER BEST FRIEND WHEN SHE WAS A MOUSY TEENAGER, AND TOO WHEN SHE BECAME A FAMOUS FASHION MODEL AND HIGHLY PAID MOVIE ACTRESS — I WAS STILL HER BEST FRIEND. THEN MATT LOWDEN CAME BACK INTO OUR LIVES, AND FOR THE FIRST TIME, I BECAME AWARE OF MY BEST FRIEND —
The Loveliest of All!
IT ISN'T FAIR! MATT IS AN OLD FRIEND — TERESA'S GIVING HIM THE COLD TREATMENT! MATT CAN'T HELP BUT FALL IN LOVE WITH HER — BUT ONCE HE DOES, TERESA WILL NEVER LOOK AT HIM TWICE AGAIN

BOOKS ARE A MORE COLLECT INFORMATION! OFTEN THEY PO DREAMS, WEAR SOULS OF AUTH REMOTE ALIVE! PERHAPS THAT W MINOR CRIME'S WAS HIDDEN IN. BE IT WAS NOT IN HIS PERHAPS THAT WA WE WAS CONTEMPTUOUSLY CALLED THIS...
STORY NICK CUTI
ART ALEX TOTH
ISN'T THAT MR. BIG CREASH, THE MILLIONAIRE, CLERK?
YES, THAT'S HIM! YOU KNOW I ONCE THOUGHT THAT HE BOUGHT MY BOOKS BECAUSE HE ENJOYED READING THEM — BUT NOW I THINK THAT HE'S LOOKING FOR SOMETHING!

WHAT DO YOU SUPPOSE HE'S LOOKING FOR?
I DON'T KNOW! PERHAPS A WAY TO MAKE MORE MILLIONS — OR THE SECRET OF IMMORTALITY!
FOOLS! DON'T THEY REALIZE THAT I CAN HEAR THEIR EVERY WORD?

STOREKEEP! YOU HAVE A TERRIBLE SELECTION OF BOOKS HERE! I WOULDN'T MAKE A PURCHASE AT ALL, TODAY, IF I DIDN'T NEED A NOTEBOOK —!
THERE'S NO KEY TO THAT LOCK SIR — SORRY!

3/ BUT 'BOOKWORM' SAW PRINT, LATER, (MY VERSION) and I WAS HAPPY TO SEND NICK NOTICE OF SAME, WITH SCRIPT FEE CHECK, TOO, OUT OF THE BLUE; JUST AS HE and HIS FAMILY WERE MOVING FROM TOWN TO TOWN INTO A NEW HOME OUT HERE IN OUR DESERT VISTAS — SERENDIPITY / SYNCHRONICITY — YUP — HAPPY ENDING! NICK WENT ON TO BIGGER-BETTER-THINGS IN-PRINT / TV / FILM MEDIA!

NICE GUY — MANY TALENTS — OBVIOUSLY!

WE NEVER MET — JUST A BRIEF NOTE OR TWO, RE' BOOKWORM' and CHECK'S TIMELINESS —

SO, TOO, ENDED MY LINK WITH MY BRIEF SPIN WITH 'CHARLTON' — WHERE PAT BOYETTE HAD LONG-LABORED AS A HAPPY CAMPER, DOING FINE WORK ON MANY BOOK-SERIES — FRANK BOLLE'S 'PHANTOM' WAS VERY NICELY-DONE AS A SERIES — CLEAN-SIMPLE FOTO-BASED STYLING — KUDOS TO HIM, TOO —

AND TO JOE GILL, FOR HIS ENDLESS MILES of SIMPLE SCRIPTS that DID the JOB; SANS FUSS N' FEATHERS!

AS ISAAC STERN ADVISED: MAKE IT SO SIMPLE YOU CAN'T CHEAT'!!!

INDEED / ©ALEX TOTH '01

- MEGERIE GAS CLOUD IS RELEASED FROM A JET IN THE BUCKLE — WHICH CEMENTS THE MASK TO HIS FACE AND ALTERS THE COLOR OF HIS CLOTHING AND HAIR!
QUESTION STRIKES!

Top: *We apologize for the fuzzy resolution, but here's the splash page to Alex's single romance story for Charlton from My Only Love #3 Courtesy of Don Mangus. ©2001 the respective copyright holder.* **Left:** *Page from "Bookworm" by Alex & Nick Cuti. ©2001 Alex Toth & Nick Cuti.* **Right:** *Two panels from Alex's Question story in Charlton Bullseye #5. ©2001 DC Comics*

Wildman Times at Charlton

Talking with Charlton's Managing Editor (& Popeye artist)

Conducted by Jon B. Cooke
Transcribed by Brian K. Morris

George Wildman is the most significant editor in the history of Charlton Comics after the legendary "Action Hero" tenure of Dick Giordano (whose era was so thoroughly covered in CBA #9). George brought to the comics line a brand identity, innovative titles, and he—with the able help of his assistant editor Nicola Cuti—attracted a laudatory stream of talented freelancers to the books, including Alex Toth, Neal Adams, Steve Ditko, and Tom Sutton, among many others. Also a talented cartoonist, he continues to draw to this day, illustrating children's books for Random House, among other clients. He is the recipient of a number of National Cartoonist Society awards. George was interview by phone on April 18, 2000, and the artist/editor copyedited the final transcript

Below: *George Wildman contributed this illustration—featuring Popeye and Company—to accompany his interview in* Charlton Bullseye #2. *Characters ©2001 King Features Syndicate. Courtesy of Bob Layton and CPL/Gang Productions.*

Comic Book Artist: *You worked in advertising before you went with Charlton?*

George Wildman: Yes, I was in advertising about 20 years or so. I didn't get into comics until I was 40 years old when I went to Charlton. So I didn't start right out of college.

CBA: *You maintained a one-person advertising studio?*

George: I produced industrial catalogs, newspaper trade ads, consumer publications, packaging, etc. Accounts like Stiex and Bridgeport Gas Company, companies in our area. There was the Seamless Rubber Company, a big outfit, and I handled all their catalog work. They made a whole line of sporting goods. And the advertising work was a lot of good background, but I always liked to cartoon, and when I heard of Charlton Publishing, I decided to go for freelance work there. Even though they were close to me, I never knew what they were or what they did. So I called on them in the early '50s—looking for freelance and they liked what I did and that's how it started. They had titles like *The Little Farm Boy*, and they also had super hero, romance and Western—plus a few others. That was the first time I met Dick Giordano. He was on staff then as an assistant editor to Pat Masulli who was then the editor at Charlton.

CBA: *Did you work directly with Dick, who gave you the assignments?*

George: Yeah, right. When Pat wouldn't be around, I'd deal with Dick. Dick was a real great guy to deal with—I always liked Dick, always have and always will—because we get along, that's for sure.

CBA: *You were working on humor material?*

George: Basically. I tried my hand at romance and I died. But they only paid $6.50 a page! I used to have to lean strongly on reference material like *Terry and the Pirates* or stuff that was in the comics. Caniff, *Backstage*, a whole bunch of them going at that time. But it would take me hours to literally do a page. Finally, I told them romance was not my category. Then they said, "Well, we're going to be getting into some humor stuff," so they might need me, and they started *Timmy, The Timid Ghost*, and a bunch of other stuff, and that's where I came in. I did freelance for Charlton and along about that time, 1955, I got married. It wasn't a lot of money per page but I could make money because I could do the humor stuff quick.

CBA: *You drew the Charlton material at night?*

George: Yes. Nights, weekends. You know, that sort of thing. I took a few more titles. I used to have a production list of the books, but I can't find it right now. We had 42 titles.

CBA: *Wow. Did you go to the office?*

George: Yeah, oh sure because I lived in Hamden, Connecticut, and Derby is just over the hill, it's 10, 12 miles. So I would bring my assignments in and then they'd give me new work.

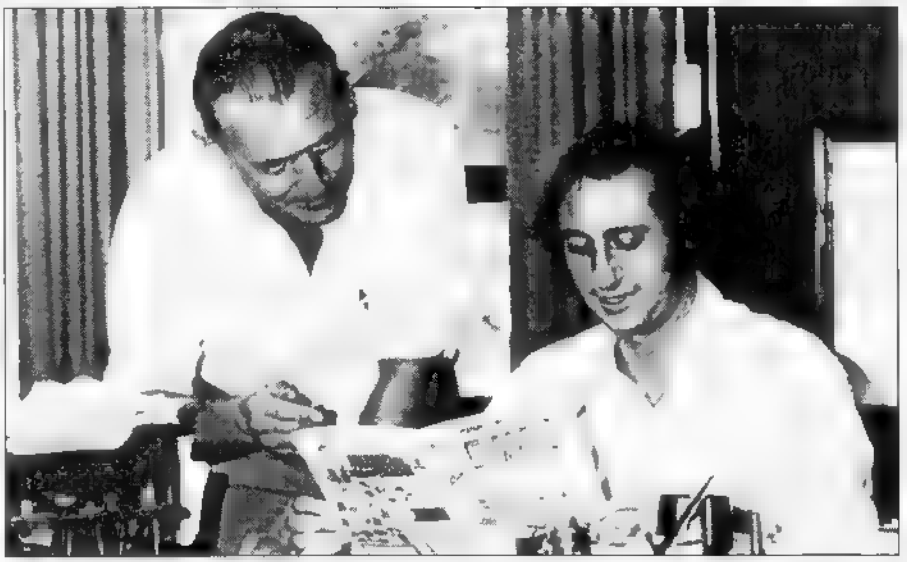
CBA: *Did you strike up any acquaintances with any other freelancers going in at the time?*

George: No, I don't think I ever met any because I was in and out. I would come in and believe me, I mean, I grew up with Superman and Batman and Jack Kirby's work. I remember him from *Boy Commandos*, and that sort of stuff. I enjoyed comics but I never thought I'd be drawing them. My agenda was to get into advertising what I majored in when I was in college, and I still came into comics only I came through the back door.

CBA: *Did you try to seek out any ad work in New York? Did you go to Ogilvy & Mather, for instance?*

George: I never had to go that far because I had enough work in the New Haven area. My major accounts were based in Hartford and major cities in Connecticut.

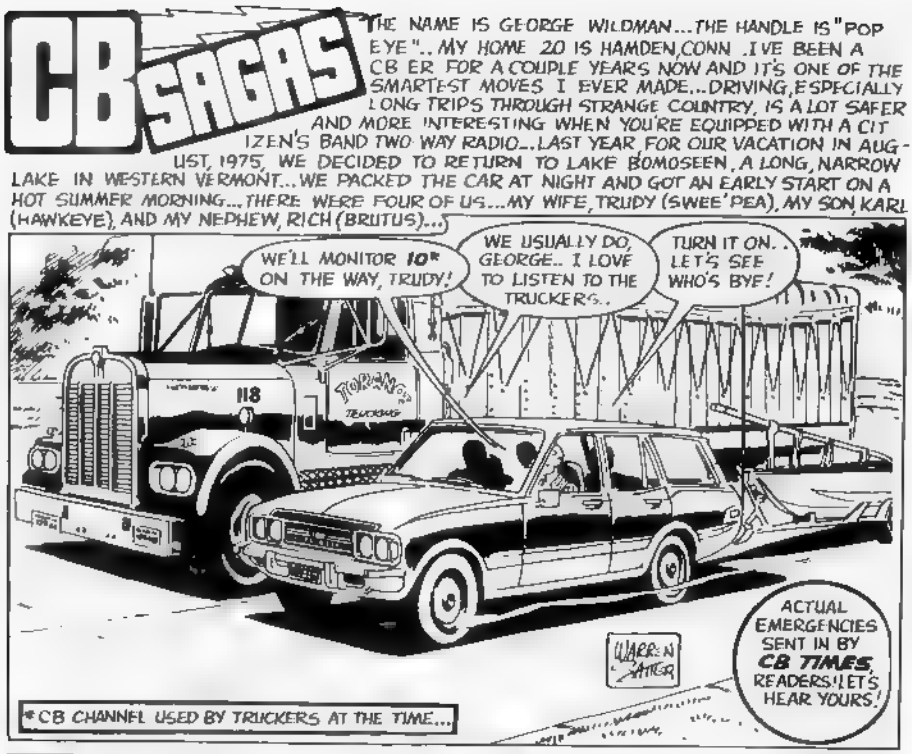
CBA: *How did you find out about a editorial position at Charlton?*
George: I found out about Charlton through a friend and from there on, I just had a good rapport with them by doing the assignments. In 1969, I went with them. Dick Giordano left Charlton in 1968 and Sal Gentile got bumped up. Sal was a boardman and he became editor of the comics line.
CBA: *What does "boardman" mean?*
George: Staff artist in the bullpen. They had about six guys in-house that did a lot of the art. Two of the guys were strictly romance men. They were just generally, good staff artists who did paste-up, touch-up.
CBA: *Charles Nicholas, for instance?*
George: Yeah, you got it. Vince Alascia and Charlie Nicholas.
CBA: *Was Vince Colletta in with any frequency?*
George: Vince Colletta? No.
CBA: *I noticed he did some romance books and he had an office, I believe, in the New Haven area. He was predominantly known as an inker for Marvel, but it is said he was also a glamour photographer.*
George: There was another guy local too. He did some work, I think, at one time. His name was Jon D'Agostino who became a big guy with Archie. I didn't know him when he worked at Charlton, but I don't think it was too long.
CBA: *So, Charlie and Vince were pretty much a team?*
George: Yeah, they were like the Bobbsey Twins. They sat there and just cranked it out, strictly romance. Oh, I'll tell you how they worked. Charlie penciled and Vince inked. That's it. And Joe Gill cranking out scripts by the pound. [*laughter*] He was the writer.
CBA: *Man, they did a lot of work.*
George: I *tell* you. They did the graphics and Joe wrote it all. To give you some funny insight, sometimes Joe would start a story, and on page one the girl was a blonde, but by page ten, she was a redhead! [*laughter*] And the names would change.
CBA: *He was pounding it out?*
George: You got it, man. He had a hot keyboard there.
CBA: *I've heard stories on how Charlton got started. Do you have any insight on this?*
George: John Santangelo started it. It's an old story but he was like a Ford or an Edison. You know, if you dropped him in a desert he'd have six guys working for him in three days. [*laughter*] It's just the nature of the beast, you know. He had that touch. You can't instill it in anyone. It's born in them. Along the way, he met a fellow named Levey, a lawyer, and together they started the company, which was to become Charlton Press. King Features was one of his first contacts, and he bought the rights to dailies like *Terry and the Pirates, Flash Gordon,* etc. and his original comic department were guys who just cut the strips and pasted them on flats and made comic books. That was before me, before Ed Konick, before anybody.
CBA: *Charlton was unique in the field because it was an all-in-one operation.*
George: That's another part of Santangelo's genius. As you know, to make a cake, you've got to crack a few eggs. Well, he caught on in a hurry about how this game ran. And he soon figured why pay all this money out to distributors, to wholesalers, to sales people, to engravers, to printers, to outsiders—so he thought along the lines of Henry Ford. "I'll get all of my own equipment and I won't have to pay anything to anybody." Before he got through, when I came to the company, they had a plant that covered six acres of land, with one roof. You started right up in the front with editorial, we had Joe Gill if you know what I mean. And in the comic department alone, we had all our own editorial people. In magazines, most of their people were on staff. Until we got more and more successful, then he started getting more freelance people. But basically, he went, "How do you print a book? You need engraving and you need paper and then, etc." And then even into, naturally, distribution came followed by—you need the trucks to ship this stuff. He shipped everything as far as the Mississippi. We our own fleet of trucks to do it. So he had everything under one roof. That was also part of how he could swing with, you know what I mean, moods or modes, whatever was going on.
CBA: *Now, magazine distribution is renowned for being a strong-arm business because you have to deal with Teamsters. There's just a lot of things going on that might be considered unseemly. How was it the Old Man was able to break off from dealing with the main distributors? Did they just ignore him, or . . ?*
George: [*laughter*] I don't know. All I know is the Old Man came up from Italy through the ranks and he spoke the language and he knew how to be Numero Uno. [*laughter*] When it had to come to bare knuckles, he could use 'em.
CBA: *Pat Masulli went upstairs, went over in a lateral move to work on the magazines, and Dick came up and took the position as Managing Editor of the comic book line. When Dick came, it was, there were very—well, I can't say they were "best selling" books, but, critically popular books. Dick did something really good. Steve Ditko really shined when he was working for him. Some great books were coming out and going over with the fans. Eventually DC saw what was going on and they made an offer that Dick couldn't refuse. He went over there to work for them and took most of his freelancers with him.*
George: This is what happened, where Masulli's move was lateral but Dick's move was out the door. [*laughter*] So the Old Man looked around and he said, "Hey, Gentile. You know how to do the books." Masulli was in magazines. So he said, "You're going to be editor." So Sal was... he had a good name, Gentile, gentleel. [*laughter*] He was a nice guy, you know. He was not aggressive. He sat in his seat, knew what to do. He had learned it and learned it well. The momentum was there when Dick left and Sal kind of kept it going, okay? Dick Giordano's big innovation too, in the line, a huge success, was the introduction of super-heroes with the *Blue Beetle, Captain Atom, Judomaster, Peacemaker, Thunderbolt.* All of which, I think, were successes. Dick left and they floundered if you will.
CBA: *Yeah, they were off the map, gone.*
George: Any catbird could have sat in that seat and I can tell you, they had a budget problem with the Old Man, who was tight with bucks. I mean, you couldn't say, "Let's lay out a million dollars. I



Concluding Paula Hopper's photo essay from CARTOONIST PROfiles *#20.* **Above top:** *Charlton comics managing editor George Wildman and Robert Jobe, the data processing manager, observing the UNIVAC optical scanner which is the basis of the unique no-sort return process at Charlton. The computer eliminates the hand-sorting and counting traditionally used in the comics field to tabulate returns.* **Above:** *Editor Wildman and Charlton publisher John Santangelo, Jr., reviewing press proofs of the first issue of the title from which Charlton was "expecting big things," the fondly recalled E-Man.* ©2001 CARTOONIST PROfiles. *Used with the permission.*

EDITOR'S NOTE:

We had every intention of covering Charlton Comics managing editor Sal Gentile's tenure between 1968-72, but our request for an interview with Mr. Gentile was declined for health reasons by his family. CBA wishes the artist/editor a speedy recovery and hopes that one day we can discuss with him his experiences at Charlton Press. Thanks to Chris Irving for his dogged detective work.


CB SAGAS
THE NAME IS GEORGE WILDMAN...THE HANDLE IS "POP EYE"... MY HOME 20 IS HAMDEN,CONN. I'VE BEEN A CB ER FOR A COUPLE YEARS NOW AND IT'S ONE OF THE SMARTEST MOVES I EVER MADE...DRIVING, ESPECIALLY LONG TRIPS THROUGH STRANGE COUNTRY, IS A LOT SAFER AND MORE INTERESTING WHEN YOU'RE EQUIPPED WITH A CIT IZEN'S BAND TWO WAY RADIO...LAST YEAR, FOR OUR VACATION IN AUG- UST, 1975, WE DECIDED TO RETURN TO LAKE BOMOSEEN, A LONG, NARROW LAKE IN WESTERN VERMONT...WE PACKED THE CAR AT NIGHT AND GOT AN EARLY START ON A HOT SUMMER MORNING...THERE WERE FOUR OF US...MY WIFE, TRUDY (SWEE'PEA), MY SON, KARL (HAWKEYE), AND MY NEPHEW, RICH (BRUTUS)...
WE'LL MONITOR 10* ON THE WAY, TRUDY!
WE USUALLY DO, GEORGE.. I LOVE TO LISTEN TO THE TRUCKERS..
TURN IT ON.. LET'S SEE WHO'S BYE!
ACTUAL EMERGENCIES SENT IN BY CB TIMES READERS! LET'S HEAR YOURS!
*CB CHANNEL USED BY TRUCKERS AT THE TIME...
BREAKER 10.. YOU GOT ONE SMILEY, SOUTHBOUND ON 91 HAULIN' A PORTABLE PARK- ING LOT OUT OF HARTFORD TOWN...TRYIN' FOR A NORTH BOUNDER... C'MON.!
KGM 5455, BREAKER, CHANNEL 10. HOW A- BOUT YOU, ONE SMILEY? YOU GOT POPEYE NORTHBOUND, C'MON!

Above: *Courtesy of the artist, Warren Sattler here the splash page to a comic book story appearing in the Charlton magazine, CB Times, written by George "Popeye" Wildman featuring the artist/editor himself in a bona fide real life citizen's band adventure! 'Member when CBs were all the rage back in the 70s? 10-4 that, good buddy! ©2001 the respective copyright holder*

think this is going to go." He wouldn't buy that. You had to tell him, "This thing is going to go, then we'll lay out the million dollars." And anyway, so Dick left. And along about this time, in my era—and I'm still doing freelance—and I was sorry to see Dick go. He was a joy to deal with. And Gentile sits in the seat. And all of a sudden, in my advertising business, I lost two major accounts. They went to California, no fault of my own. They wanted me to go with them and I wouldn't do it. And I got married and my whole life was changing. All of a sudden, I had a deviated septum operation. All this hit, like, within a couple of weeks. My health, the business, everything. You know what I'm saying? So Sal knew what happened and he said, "Hey, how would you like a steady job?" When they waved that flag in front of me, at this time, you know, and whatever perks there were and all that. He said, "How about you be the Assistant Editor?" And I said, "Fine." And that's what happened and I became the assistant editor. And that happened in 1969, '70, and lasted through 1972, when I became editor. And then, by that time, in those two or three years, I had learned a lot of it was just applying my knowledge of advertising, offset printing, the whole shtick, all that was in my background. But now you're learning a whole new game, though, of publishing comics: people, trips to the city, New York, and all of a sudden, I said, "Hey, this isn't too bad." Because, again, they weren't the top-paying company, Charlton, so the only tactic I could do to survive was, I said, "Hey, look. I'll take this job but I still want to do *Popeye*."

CBA: *The King Features license came in 1969, right?*

George: Right. That's it, just when I came in.

CBA: *You were the first Charlton freelancer on Popeye or did Budd Sagendorf do any?*

George: Sagendorf was never with Charlton. They wanted new stuff. I was freelance and Popeye was always one of my favorites when I was a kid. I always liked it. I submitted sketches and King Features accepted mine. And that's how I got it and then I said "With my *Popeye* freelance and the job here, I can live." And they agreed to it. I couldn't live on what they paid. And that's how it started, and it grew. Sal went over to magazines, Masulli was let go. Anyway, he was asked to leave, and he did. Sal went over to magazines and I became the skipper, as far as comics.

CBA: *Did you had wide-open eyes going in? Did you realize Charlton was pretty much the bottom of the barrel when it came to comics?*

George: You asked a lot of guys in those days—Joe Gill. You might even think of artists who are now up there. Don't forget John Byrne and a lot of those guys were looking for work back then, and they couldn't find any work. And they hit upon this half-assed company called Charlton and they're kind of a joy to work with because their work was great. You think I'm going to tell John Byrne in those days, "Hey, do this page over, do that page over"? He was cranking out some real great stuff. And so was Steve Ditko, Pat Boyette, Fred Himes and on and on. It kept growing, you know. And as soon as they got going, and on seeing their work Marvel and DC said, "Hey! These guys are great." And bingo, off they went. [laughter] We were kind of like a proving ground, if you will. But in the meantime though, a lot of the artists don't use their Charlton work in their portfolios today but a lot of did get their start there.

CBA: *And, interestingly, you had Steve Ditko who really could go anywhere and do anything. He did an enormous amount of work for Charlton.*

George: Oh, and how.

CBA: *And at low rates, and yet he could have commanded quite higher page rates over at DC or at Marvel.*

George: As I said before, oh, yes indeed. I agree 100%. I used to wonder, "What is Steve staying here for?" Have you ever met Ditko? Charlton Publications had a big New York office, you know.

CBA: *The one-day-a-week office in that law firm or was it an office devoted exclusively to Charlton?*

George: An office just for Charlton. Yeah, because they had a staff. And the Old Man, again, knew a New York office was very important. It gives you prestige, you know. In those days New York was... hey, come on! That's big time. So guys at Parade would go to the New York office and I had a runner and he'd go down two or three times a week to the New York office and pick up the work, blah, blah, blah. That's how that ran. Once in a while, I would go into New York and just happened to meet Steve Ditko. He was a quiet kind of a guy and he was, almost, Casper Milquetoast—very quiet, very unassuming. Yeah, you could walk right by him. I remember I got into the main office and I said, "Hey, has Steve Ditko got here yet?" And the girl said, "Oh, you just passed him out in the front office." And that's how I met him. I said, "Hey, Steve," and we hit it off real great but he was very shy, though he was a nice guy. Maybe that's why, like I say, he didn't go charging out into the world of comics, saying, "Hey, hey, look what I can do here," and so on.

CBA: *Steve apparently had very, very strong feelings about Marvel and DC and it seems that it was the freedom at Charlton that he liked.*

George: Sure, I turned guys like him loose. They really enjoyed it—and it showed.

CBA: *When you came on, you had, what, 40 titles?*

George: Oh yes, 42 titles. Yeah, then I hired Nick Cuti as my assistant editor. I had gotten the word out by just telling the guys I needed an editor. Some freelancers said, "Hey, there's this guy Nick Cuti. He's looking for work."

CBA: *Nick was working with Wally Wood at the time.*

George: Oh yeah, right. He and Bill Pearson were nuts for Wally Wood. Boy, Wally Wood was their icon! He was a half-hour from Charlton.

CBA: *The real highlight before you came on was when Dick Giordano was editor. Then you came on and another renaissance of*

sorts took place at Charlton. It really established an identity. You seemed to take an advertising sensibility to the company by establishing a brand for Charlton. Beforehand, when you looked at the books, you couldn't tell who the hell published them.

George: Yeah, I changed things. I went after the pressroom and got new presses. These things happened gradually, not overnight. But the Old Man hadn't gone over the figures. We had a staff meeting every week and would review everything. But I made enemies too because Masulli, who had set the system, if you will, and Gentile just carried it on, the same name, same writers, same this and that. I started looking for new writers and new artists and new styles, new techniques, new approaches and this caused a lot of headaches. I was a real bastard to the internal people, you know, because I'd tell the regulars, "You've either got to start shaping up or—" And I started hiring new people, got new stories, and I remember Joe Gill wasn't too pleased. The department was wide open on the floor. I didn't have an office. Everything was right out on the floor. I lasted 16 years. I never realized it was that long. It was very exciting. I'll be very honest with you because I travelled, did things other editors never did. I used to go on promotional trips. Also, I drew *Popeye*. I wore two or three hats, you see, and the wholesalers loved it. I'd come into St. Louis and we had PR people. I hired a girl to handle my travel, airplane reservations. She took care of all that. I did things that never would have happened before. I don't know, it matriculated. I kept these new innovations in mind, coming in. It worked great because they loved it. They loved it because they would program it and I'd go to a city and in the morning we'd do the local talk show. Every city has a local talk show in the morning. And then I'd tell everybody there, courtesy of the so-and-so publishers and your local, give them a big plug. You pull in all the PR while you're on the air and I'd say, "Look out for me at the hospitals." I'd do all the children's wards in the major hospitals in the afternoon, signing casts, drawing *Popeye*. So you were projecting an image for the company. I was always plugging a book of ours, the humor line. You're pulling in the wholesalers and we'd usually stay one or two days in the city and . started doing a lot of that.

CBA: *Marvel and DC pretty much had the super heroes locked up. There was a great emphasis at Charlton on the other genre books like romance, war and Westerns.*

George: Obviously we had humor. Westerns, romance, ghosts, sci-fi, and super-heroes.

CBA: *Right, and when Nick came on board, did he bring strengths with him?*

George: Nick was very good for me, in a sense, because Nick knew everything, you name it. He knew who was doing what or where they started or what they were planning and he had a lot of very good insight as to our loyal competition, DC and Marvel, and what was going on overseas. I came into this role into the comics world at 40 years old, but Nick grew up in it.

CBA: *Nick was marinated with comics.* [*laughter*]

George: You got it. Yeah. [*laughter*] At times, I had to tell him, "Quiet. Just shut up, Nick. I've heard enough about comics for now." [*laughter*] But he came up with E-Man. You know that super-hero we did?

CBA: *Oh, yeah.*

George: That was our biggie. Plus, we were getting rights to properties like *The Six Million Dollar Man*. He loved it when we got into these areas, dealing with Universal and the other studios. Then we came up with *Doomsday +1*, written by Joe Gill and drawn by John Byrne. I'll never forget the time I sent Nick to New York, to see this new show coming up called *Space: 1999*. I said, "When you get done, tell me if this is as good as—or equal to—*Star Trek*." He comes back, "Oh man, it was off the wall. It was wonderful," and so on. We got the rights to it though it never quite made it. But that's what he was good at. In all fairness to the guy, he was a very creative person and 100% comics. You couldn't find a better guy to have on staff in that capacity. He was totally comics.

CBA: *Did you review the portfolios or the submissions first? Let's say, when Joe Staton came a'calling.*

George: Oh yeah, he was fantastic. Sal was still editor when he came down the line. And he and his wife: what a beautiful couple they were. So they were so cute, they were so quiet. And yet he could draw this dynamic stuff. Yeah. I was there to see this stuff. You know when you are the editor, I'll tell you this, and *you* know it. When people are submitting stuff to you, you see 90% crap come across your board. I'm sorry, I can't see it any other way. And all of a sudden—*bing*—you see one that pops out, and it's so obvious. All the rest, you can tell they've traced *Superman*, leaned on *Batman*, swiped from the *Fantastic Four*. Now all of a sudden, there comes this free spirit and you can tell it. And, yeah, I remember when we'd go over new submissions, sure.

CBA: *How did you hook up with Bob Layton? Do you remember him?*

George: He was another good one, sure.

CBA: *Remember the* Charlton Bullseye *magazine that came out?*

George: It was his idea. He was an artist, and he and Nick—boy, you talk about hitting it off! Those two were wow. Bob came out of where, the Midwest, somewhere?

CBA: *Yeah, right. Indiana, I think.*

George: Oh, did he talk. [*laughter*] He's a nice guy. Buh-buh-buh-buh, he never stopped. He had all kind of ideas. was going to lick the world, and did in many ways. He was a great guy. And he was the one who said we should have a house organ. So he and Nick got on it and everything else. And I agree with him. Everybody else

Nick.
Thanks for all the GREAT creative contributions during your tenure with Charlton Comics!
Best of Luck, to you, in all future ventures!
George 10/16/75
ZZZZZ
Wildman '75
HEH! HEH!

Above: *Original cover art to* Popeye *#133 by George Wildman. Note George's inscription to his departing assistant editor Nick Cuti. Courtesy of Nick Cuti. Characters ©2001 King Features Syndicate.*

Above: *Charlton was a fanzine-friendly publisher (as were its free-lancers), as evidenced by this E-Man cover illo by Joe Staton drawn for Poor Richard's Adzine #2, 1974.* **Below:** *For a period, the Charlton characters were darlings of* The Comic Reader. *Here's John Byrne's Rog-2000 illo for #114. E-Man ©2001 Joe Staton. Yang & Rog-2000 ©20001 the respective copyright holders.*

had one and we didn't, and it was cheap for us. We could print it on scrap, you know. Run off a roll, run off 50,000, so it wasn't any problem.

CBA: *I've got an obscure question for you. In 1971 or in 1972, a whole bunch of comics came out very late in their sequence. Mostly the Hanna-Barbera titles, like the third or fourth issue of each title came out, four or five months after they were supposed to. For instance—and this is really obscure—*The Flintstones *#3 came out after #5 came out. Do you have any idea what that was?*

George: No. No, I don't. I know we weathered a lot of storms over here. We had a paper shortage one time. Though I wasn't there, there was a flood of '55, and the plant was under water. They got through that, though.

Here's a story about the Old Man. He would sit in his office with a big window and he saw these bricklayers and knew who was screwing off and who wasn't because he used to lay bricks way back when. [*laughter*] He used to go to a man, "This guy's not worth a sh*t. Get rid of him." [*laughter*] He could tell how many bricks you should lay an hour. Anyway, my allegiance to Charlton will always be a warm spot in my heart. It introduced me to this world of comics. And, true, the *Popeye* work that I did later led Random House to contact me for work. They liked what I did and I did a best seller for Random House on Popeye, a pop-up, and the first I ever did. And I did a mix-and-match for them also, that goes with the *Popeye* movie. It got me into Western Publishing and different folks started contacting me. I don't think it ever would have happened if I hadn't got that exposure through good old Charlton Press over there. So when their ship was sinking, I think, at the end in the early 1980s—let's see, I have a date here. October. . . yeah, yeah, I found this note to myself. Friday, October 4, 1985 was my last day, when I left Charlton. Prior to that, for like four years, we had been doing nothing but reruns of old material. And all I did was hire artists to do a new cover or even take a page and blow it up and it became the cover. You know what I mean? And so many of the guys out there knew it, too. They'd say, "Sheesh, this is *junk* you're turning out, you know," or, "I bought this book ten years ago." And on and on it went. It just got worse, and the budget got tighter and tighter and so finally got off. I stayed as long as I could. I had too many other people on the outside asking me to do work to stay there. I was like Dick Giordano back in 1968. It was time to get out.

CBA: *Did you hire Bill Pearson?*

George: Yeah. Bill was a nice guy. He was another Nick Cuti in a way. He wasn't as talkative as Layton or Nick Cuti. Bill was very quiet, a reserved kind of fellow. A good writer, organizer and his own person. What else can I tell you?

CBA: *He packaged the reprints?*

George: Yeah, you got that right.

CBA: *With* E-Man, *were you looking to make a push into super-heroes, into the Marvel market, so to speak?*

George: Yeah, I think of where we had our shortcomings and realize we never had big publicity budgets to really boost a project and get the word out and so on. We just relied on the newsstands, it got out. *E-Man* had a lot of fans but it never went flying off the racks, though, you know what I mean? It sold but it didn't reach our expectations, what we had hoped.

CBA: *It was surprising to hear Nick tell me that* E-Man *was the worst-selling Charlton book on the stands at the time, but it was the best selling title to subscribers.*

George: Yeah. Nick always came up with a good line. I remember we used to house ads in the books, you know, and he came up with the line, "Always have Charlton comics delivered to your door by a government agent." [*laughter*] When I saw it I said, "What the hell is this, 'a government agent'?" (I was pretty stupid.) "It's the mailman," Nick said. "Hey, you're right!" Delivered to your door.

CBA: *Did they handle the subscriptions in-house at Charlton?*

George: Yes.

CBA: *Did everything under one roof, huh?*

George: You got it. In fact, we even had our own ballroom.

CBA: *I heard about that. Marble floors?*

George: The ballroom was huge but it was nice if you were an employee and you were getting married, it was on the house—your reception, etc.

CBA: *Oh, really?*

George: Oh yeah. And our Christmas party, the Thanksgiving thing, or again, weddings, bar mitzvahs, anything anybody needed just reserve it and just clean up after yourself. But it was all marble, imported from Italy. The Old Man again, being from there, saw and knew all the places to get everything the right way and all that. When they made the latest Home Depot or Lowe's or whatever. I think it was Home Depot who got it, got the land, got the whole package. They just bulldozed all this stuff down, including the ballroom. I tell you, when I look back now at all the artists. I saw their work was sent to the binder where it was ground up and it was sold as scrap paper. Oh, yeah. It was Boyette, and you name it. John

Byrne, he couldn't get it out of there. You couldn't touch it. It wasn't being used for engraving, it all got shipped right into the dumpster and it went out.

CBA: *You guys just held on to the negatives and that was it?*

George: Dick Giordano knew this and when Dick, when he was with DC, he made some deals with Charlton. I think he bought, like, the Blue Beetle, he bought out anything that was super-hero type stuff.

CBA: *While at Marvel and at DC, artists were starting to be given their art work back in '73 and '74, that just never took place at Charlton?*

George: No, you signed a deal. It was the Old Man's, and that's it.

CBA: *Did you have artists requesting to get their original artwork back?*

George: I'll never forget the one who gave me a hard time. Who was Dick Giordano's partner?

CBA: *Neal Adams.*

George: Neal Adams. Okay, when we got the license to The Six Million Dollar Man, the rights, I called Dick Giordano because I knew if I wanted two great artists, they were right there, Giordano and Neal Adams. And they said, "Sure, we'd be glad to," and so we set up the deal and they produced the black-&-white magazines of *The Six Million Dollar Man* and *Emergency!* After an issue or two, I called Dick and got Neal and I told him, "Hey, Neal, everything's fine and everything but we'd like to get some samples of the artwork and have it on display for a promotional event. The Old Man has personally asked for it." And he said, "You tell the Old Man if he wants it, he can pay for it. $200 a page." *[laughter]* I said, "Forget it!" And the Old Man says, "Who does he think he is?" and all that. Next thing you know, he said, "Screw them. Get two other artists." *[laughter]* That's right. So I got Jack Sparling. For a while, too, on a lot of our romance books, we started using artists from the Philippines and South America. Everything, all the time, was always money, money, money.

CBA: *Just keep it cheap, keep it cheap. So, did you deal directly with the Filipino and South American artists?*

George: I would just send them X amount of scripts with no deadlines because they'd put it on a donkey and send it up into the hills. *[laughter]* That was the only deadline you could get out of those guys.

CBA: *Were you very far ahead on your books? So you had a lot of inventory on them?*

George: I tried. Yes, I'll tell you. In this area, books like the Hanna-Barbera books, the King Features titles, we kept ahead on. The Universal stuff, we'd have to stay a book or two ahead and the Old Man would not allow you to get six or eight issues ahead. No way, there was no money. He didn't want to spend it. I'll tell you, if a book got dropped, it didn't mean too much to us. We only had one issue ahead.

CBA: *[laughter] Who was Fred Himes?*

George: He was down in San Antonio, where Pat Boyette was. Fred Himes was a friend of Pat's. And there was a third guy down there. The Old Man got sick of paying so much to the engravers up here, and I think he found out he could get engraving done cheaper by going out. I'm getting mixed up here now, but... oh, maybe for our specials, for our magazines. That's what it was. It was for our magazines. We still continued to do comics in-house, but the magazine work went out to an outside engraver. This was Bill Klise, down in Texas. Boyette recommended Bill Klise to Sal, who was editor at that time. "There's an engraver down here who can give you a real good break." And that's how they looked into it and for a long while, all our engravings went to San Antonio. And that's how I got to go down there. I went down there two or three trips and I got to know Pat and Fred and, of course, Bill Klise.

CBA: *Wow. Was that how you got the separation process to do the paintings for the covers?*

George: Yeah.

CBA: *Alright. I just read Pat's last interview and he discussed, it must have been Bill, that Bill had either developed or had a machine that had a separation process and all of a sudden, you guys started coming out with these really nice painted covers.*

George: Maybe that's why you're saying now, we got a new look.

CBA: *Yeah. You also did a logo, right?*

George: Oh, yeah. I designed a company logo, the Charlton bullseye. And I used that too because, again, that was part of my advertising background. I thought, "Our logo's really something." And I also used all our fleet of

Above: *Doomsday +1 pin up by John Byrne.*
Right: *Rog 2000 and pal Mike Mauser by Byrne. Both from* Charlton Bullseye #2. *Characters ©2001 their respective copyright holders. Courtesy of Bob Layton & CPL/Gang Productions.*

trucks as—I used to call them "mobile billboards" and I put giant comic figures on all the trucks. The drivers loved it because anywhere they went, everybody knew these trucks. People were talking, "Wow, you sell comic books and where can I get them?" and so on. And you know, they all loved them. They got our names all over the trucks—Charlton Comics—like a billboard.

CBA: *And with the mystery books, you really played up the narrator characters.*

George: Yeah, like the ghost books. Yeah, ghost categories: *Dr. Graves.*

CBA: *Wayne Howard did a ton of work for you. What kind of guy was he?*

George: He sort of shy. Easy come, easy go.

CBA: *Sad to say, he seems to have disappeared off the map. Nobody can seem to locate him.*

George: I was just going to ask *you*. He married a sister of one of my secretaries, one of my earlier secretaries. I guess they were happy, so God bless them.

CBA: *Did he develop Midnight Tales?*

George: I think he did, with Nick. He and Nick, I think, came up—that was their brainchild. Yeah, boy, you're bringing back memories.

CBA: *[laughter] Joe Staton, did he develop Scary Tales?*

George: *Scary Tales*, possibly. I remember him doing *Scooby Doo*, too. Or what the hell was he—the other one he did that involved a car?

CBA: Wheelie and the Chopper Bunch?

George: Right, yeah. Joe did that. Joe liked to do a lot, himself.

CBA: *John Byrne actually started off at Charlton doing* Wheelie and the Chopper Bunch.

Below: *Mike Zeck drew this cool Yang pin-up for* Charlton Bullseye *#4, the "Special Kung-Fu Issue." Zeck was another important artist discovered during the Wildman era at Charlton. Yang ©2001 the respective copyright holder. Courtesy of Bob Layton & CPL/Gang Productions.*

George: And he and I got along great. Oh, yeah. He lived up in Canada. I would call him and he liked that. I'd need a ghost story and say, "John, give me a ten-pager, give me an eight pager." That's all. And it would be in the office in, like, three or four days. Penciled, inked, lettered, and everything. He was a great talent.

CBA: *You had a good personality for working with freelancers, right?*

George: Yes, because I had been one. I knew what it was to lose an account. I had one guy one time, I'll never forget—his name is not important, we were doing *The Partridge Family* and the artist would get behind. He would come in with a book, you know, once a month he'd come in. His wife would be there, his kids would be there with him. He and I would sit down, and he does a nice intro page. Then the next page is a head, a full page of a head. Six pages, a head, six pages, a head. I said, "You do this one more time . ." and he said, "No, I just thought that had a nice effect." *[laughter]* I said, "Aw, don't give me that. Tell you what: You claim you wrote it this way? Next time, I'll give you get half the book." *[laughter]* "No, no, don't do that to me, George, you can't." He had a copy machine. He had all kinds of sh*t who could help him crank it out, you know. But he came right around as soon as I said to him, "You're going to get half the book next time." Oh, Christ, I thought he was going to cry. It turned him right around. I knew what was going on.

CBA: *Yeah, but you had pretty much an understanding of that. Charlton had some of the lowest rates in the industry. So you didn't ask for very many editorial changes, right? Tom Sutton told me, for instance, it was very pleasant and easy to work for you because you didn't ask for very many changes and he got some of his best work into print without people fussing with it like the editors did over at Marvel and DC. The editors needed reasons for existence so they might request a lot of changes.*

George: Oh yeah. I remember even Joe Gill, as a writer he'd say "George, you'd go into Marvel or DC and they'd go, 'Mmm, mmm . . . now what motivated you to write panel four on page three?'" And you might be in there all afternoon for a five-page story after tracking to New York and that was the typical thing you never got at Charlton. We paid so little, we were glad to get anybody to work for us. *[laughter]* I'm certainly not about to ask you to rewrite that page.

CBA: *Do you remember Mike Zeck?*

George: He's another guy who was a fantastic artist and he came up out of Florida. Good friend of Nick Cuti. I say again, Nick and Bill Pearson brought a lot of good talent in the later years. And in the end—here's where we were nice again—I gave him all his covers and two or three of his stories. That was, like, "Just between you and I." I wasn't supposed to do it, but by this time in my career I felt, "Screw the company. This is going to help this guy out." And that's how Mike got some originals to show the other publishers. I helped him that way.

CBA: *Who or what was Modern Comics?*

George: That was a merchandising thing. Who the hell came up with that one? Was it Ed Konick . . . or somebody else?

CBA: *He says he doesn't remember. It was in '76 or '77, and Charlton reprinted a boatload of comics. Were they those ones packaged in plastic, three to a pack?*

George: It was a merchandising type thing. They would sell them to department stores—Caldor, Wal-Mart, name any chain stores you could think of. And our people didn't have to worry about distribution on these. They tried it, but I don't think it worked.

CBA: *Oh, there was no return on them, in other words?*

George: Nothing. You buy them outright. Here's how it worked. J.C. Penney would buy 100,000 from us and they could then advertise, "Buy a T-shirt and get three comics for free." The comics were used for merchandising.

CBA: *So you hired Continuity—Neal Adams and Dick Giordano—to do* The Six Million Dollar Man *and* Emergency! *magazines, right? Was that a deal to package the entire magazines?*

George: I paid them a page rate. Just between you and I, the most we ever paid for a comic was a hundred dollars a page. That was super, at the time.

CBA: *Did you look through the competition's books, Marvel and DC's output?*

George: Yeah, we got them all and I would look through them and everything. But how could I hope to compete with companies with them, their money, staff, and distribution? The highest ranking we ever got was probably fourth or fifth as far as comic publishers?

CBA: *Did you have problems with the Comics Code Authority?*

George: No. Len Darvin [*chief administrator for the Code*] was good. Man, he had a sweet deal there. Boy, for all the books that went over there, they got so much a page. He had a nice job. We didn't have too much trouble with them. They tell me it was terrible when it was first established. You couldn't have anybody punch anybody or anything like that you know. And God, look at what goes on today. But no, we didn't have much trouble with the Code.

CBA: *But you still had the logistics. You had to get the whole package over to the Code office in New York.*

George: Every book, every single book. That's what my runner was for. We didn't have FedEx and things in those days.

CBA: *The guy would just drive between Derby and New York City?*

George: Phil Martino, yeah. That was his schtick. At 2:00 every day, he'd get in the car and drive to the Comics Code.

CBA: *Did you publish the comics you wanted to, or did you have aspirations?*

George: Towards the end, I did. But, no, I never said, "We're going to change this thing completely." No, it just seems like a little piece at a time.

CBA: *In a perfect world, would you like to have gotten a job at Marvel or DC?*

George: No, no, I never, never thought of it at all. My path was so well laid-out for me by the time it came time to go out of Charlton, as I said to you, I knew enough publishers in New York that I just went out and freelanced as an artist. They knew my work and I loved that. That's how I got where I am right now. In my studio, no one bothers me and the work just kept coming. I had enough of the Rat Race, if you will. When I started at Charlton, I think we were paying $18-20 a page. And when I left, I got it up to $55. And it was nickels and dimes, literally, because I appreciated the freelance guys. I remember telling the Old Man, "They can't live on what you're paying them," and so on. "Well, go find someone else," and all that. And he'd hold up a Marvel or DC book and say, "Look at this." I said, "You know what they're paying those guys?" And it would be back and forth, back and forth.

CBA: *Did you go to comic conventions at all?*

George: Nick would go to those. I let *him* go. He was the first one that introduced me to the cons. I rented a room for Nick at the Commodore hotel, and we'd have about 14 guys sleeping on the floor in there. [*laughter*] They slept standing up. They loved it.

CBA: *He has fond memories of working with you, in spite of what went on, and it was a pleasure to work with you.*

George: Well, isn't he nice?

CBA: *The Charlton books were really fun books. In spite of the fact that perhaps 70% of the output was subpar, a solid percentage were good. Do you know what happened to Sal Gentile?*

George: He went South. He left. He had a lot of problems from stress and strain. He was his own person. He needed a quieter life. Sal was another quiet one, like Steve Ditko. You know, there was nothing about him to make you stop and say, "Ooh, who is that?" He looked like a million other people.

CBA: *One other thing: The physical layout. When you arrived to work in editorial, had they already moved to the bowling alley?*

George: Now wait a minute. The bowling alley. Had editorial moved to the bowling alley? Oh, that was *me*. Oh, my God. [*laughter*] We talking now like the ship is *The Titanic*. It's about half way down now. [*laughter*] Let me think here. They figured they better stand the comic and magazine division and the other people needed more room at the main building. This was like the Old Man holding what thought was a complex—he had the acreage. And on part of this acreage was a bowling alley. What it was is there was an office over there that was available to me. Anyway, the bowling alley was given to me and I set up this whole complex over there. And I enjoyed it very much because it got me out of the main building. I wouldn't see the Old Man and all the people from distribution. They used to walk right through my office. We had no walls. You know what I mean.

CBA: *Could you get any work done when people were bowling?*

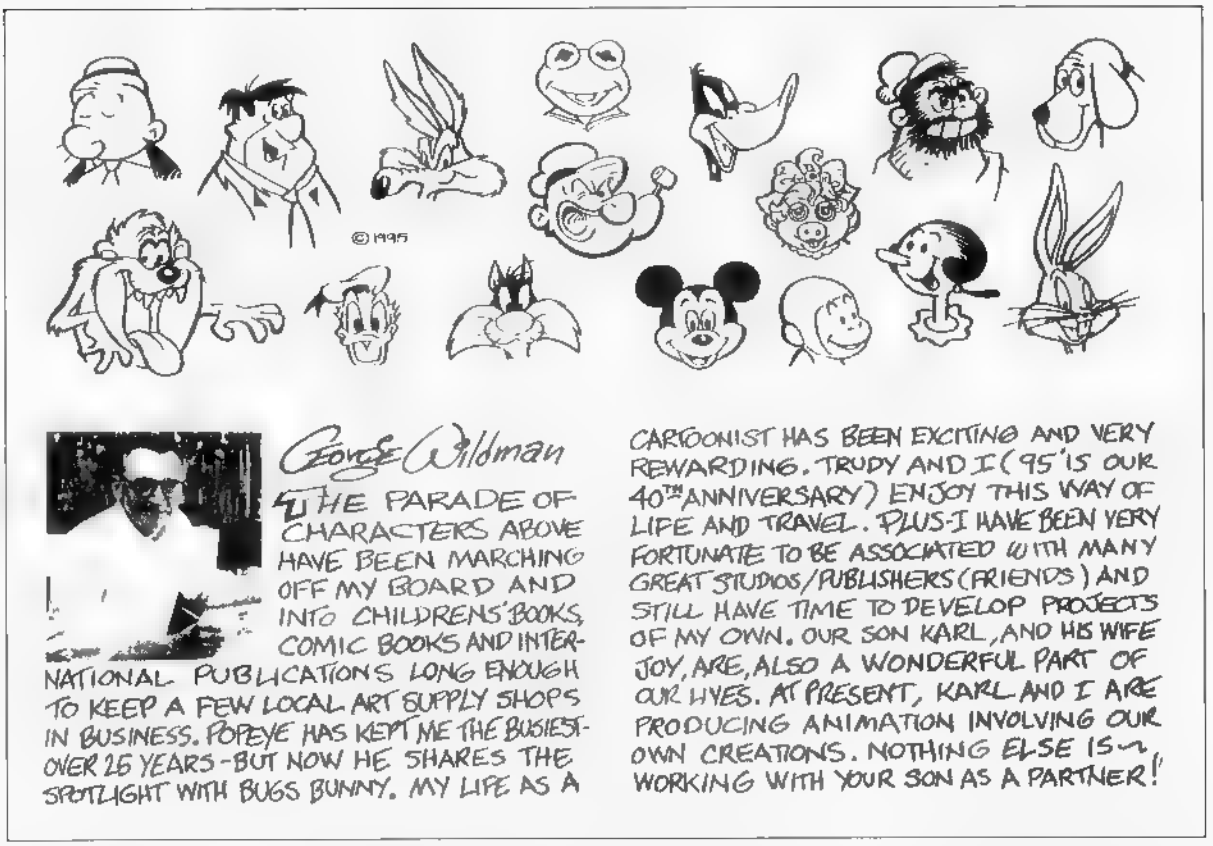
George: [*laughter*] It happened at night. The bowling alley was active mostly at night. We didn't get too hectic unless there was a league during the day. But it didn't bother us that much.

CBA: *And there was a bar in the bowling alley?*

George: Yup.

CBA: *So let's say, in '75, when Nick was there, Joe Gill was on staff? He was in the office?*

George: Joe Gill was there forever. Oh, Joe Gill looked at Nick with a jaundiced eye. "Who the hell is this young punk? I'm the writer here, you know." And I'll have to give Nick credit because if he had to tell Joe something—this was like the kid's telling the old pro—"There's a change gotta be made here, Joe." That always was there and it didn't make it easy for Nick because they were both writers. But I used Nick a *lot* as a writer. Nick was a good writer. And he wrote *Popeye*. I put him on *Popeye* right away. He had a good sense of humor and Joe Gill, to him, was another power, just grinding out


©1995
George Wildman
"THE PARADE OF CHARACTERS ABOVE HAVE BEEN MARCHING OFF MY BOARD AND INTO CHILDRENS' BOOKS, COMIC BOOKS AND INTERNATIONAL PUBLICATIONS LONG ENOUGH TO KEEP A FEW LOCAL ART SUPPLY SHOPS IN BUSINESS. POPEYE HAS KEPT ME THE BUSIEST OVER 25 YEARS - BUT NOW HE SHARES THE SPOTLIGHT WITH BUGS BUNNY. MY LIFE AS A CARTOONIST HAS BEEN EXCITING AND VERY REWARDING. TRUDY AND I (95 IS OUR 40TH ANNIVERSARY) ENJOY THIS WAY OF LIFE AND TRAVEL. PLUS-I HAVE BEEN VERY FORTUNATE TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH MANY GREAT STUDIOS/PUBLISHERS (FRIENDS) AND STILL HAVE TIME TO DEVELOP PROJECTS OF MY OWN. OUR SON KARL, AND HIS WIFE JOY, ARE, ALSO A WONDERFUL PART OF OUR LIVES. AT PRESENT, KARL AND I ARE PRODUCING ANIMATION INVOLVING OUR OWN CREATIONS. NOTHING ELSE IS— WORKING WITH YOUR SON AS A PARTNER!"

Above: *George tells us this is "my spot in the 1995 National Cartoonist Society catalog." All characters ©2001 their respective copyright holders. Courtesy of George.*

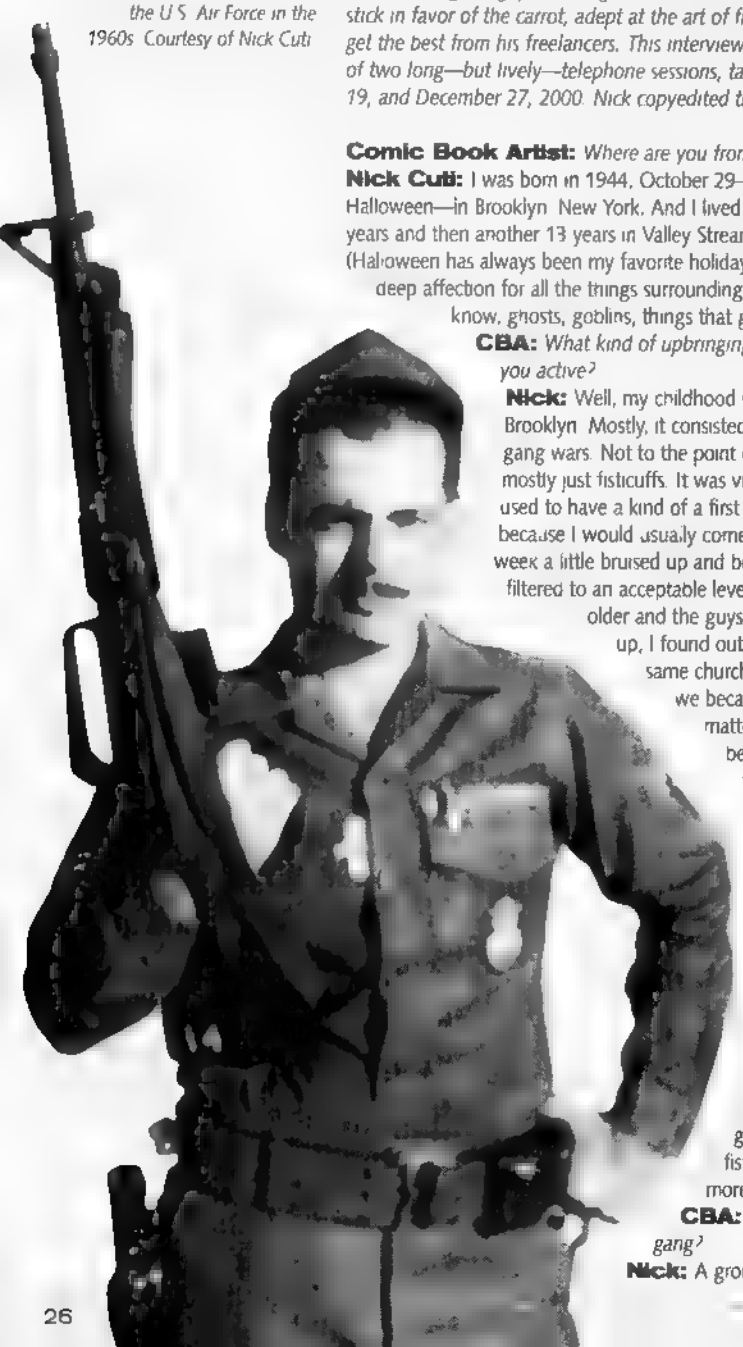
Above: *Sorry, Olive, but the Wildman interview is over! A spot illo of Popeye, his beau, and Swee'pea by George Wildman ©2001 King Features Syndicate.*

Cuti of the Cosmos

Writer/artist/assistant editor Nicola Cuti's Charlton days

Conducted by Jon B. Cooke
Transcribed by Brian Morris & Jon B. Knutson

Perhaps ye ed said it best in this issue's "Editor's Rant," but Nicola Cuti (sounds like "nutty") was, for this Charlton reader, the heart and soul of that company's output in the 1970s. As assistant editor, Nick did it all during those days in Derby—editing, writing, drawing—and the books exuded his gentle, good natured editorial touch Nick is well remembered by those fans who cared enough to check out the "third-tier" titles of Charlton's line. Along with Archie Goodwin, Louise Jones Simonson, and Dick Giordano, Nick ranks as one of the "good guys" among comic book editors, foregoing the stick in favor of the carrot, adept at the art of friendly persuasion to get the best from his freelancers. This interview is actually composed of two long—but lively—telephone sessions, taking place on March 19, and December 27, 2000. Nick copyedited the transcript.



Below: *Nick Cuti, pre-Wally Wood, as a security officer for the U.S. Air Force in the 1960s. Courtesy of Nick Cuti*

Comic Book Artist: *Where are you from, Nick?*

Nick Cuti: I was born in 1944, October 29—two days before Halloween—in Brooklyn, New York. And I lived there for about 13 years and then another 13 years in Valley Stream, Long Island. (Halloween has always been my favorite holiday and I always felt a deep affection for all the things surrounding Halloween. You know, ghosts, goblins, things that go bump in the night.)

CBA: *What kind of upbringing did you have? Were you active?*

Nick: Well, my childhood was in the streets of Brooklyn. Mostly, it consisted of friendships and gang wars. Not to the point of knives and guns, mostly just fisticuffs. It was violent. My mother used to have a kind of a first aid kit always handy because I would usually come home at least once a week a little bruised up and beaten. Eventually, it filtered to an acceptable level when I became older and the guys who used to beat me up, I found out, were going to the same church I was going to, and we became friends, as a matter of fact. The fights became a lot less violent and a lot less frequent.

CBA: *Right. Was it anything like* West Side Story?

Nick: Yeah, but not as violent. There weren't any deaths involved. Whenever one gang we'd meet would run across our gang, we'd just have fistfights. Nothing much more violent than that.

CBA: *Did you belong to a gang?*

Nick: A group of guys. It wasn't an official gang, just the kids from my apartment house, against the kids in the apartment house across the way, that sort of thing. My apartment house was all-Jewish and I was about the only Italian in the gang. The guys across the way were all Italians. That's how we started mixing. Eventually, I began to go to church and suddenly discovered that my worst enemies were there with me. So that's how we all melded together and became a lot less violent.

CBA: *Did you clue into comics at a young age?*

Nick: I got into science-fiction as a very early age. I remember one of the first books I ever read was *Tomorrow, The Stars* by Robert Heinlein, a collection of science-fiction stories, and *I, Robot* by Isaac Asimov. Up 'til then, comic books were actually a means of trade. I used to play poker with my friends at a very early age. We learned about poker and since we weren't allowed to deal with money, we used comic books. So if I lost 10 or 20 comics in a poker game, I might gain them back a little bit later. And my favorites were the science-fiction comics.

CBA: *The EC's?*

Nick: No. I didn't really start reading ECs until a much older age. The ones I enjoyed the most were *Tom Corbett, Space Cadet, Flash Gordon,* and *Buck Rogers*. I used to really, really look for those comics.

CBA: *Were you into DC's* Mystery In Space *and* Strange Adventures?

Nick: Somewhat, as a matter of fact. I did read them but not to a great degree.

CBA: *What was it about* Flash Gordon *and* Tom Corbett?

Nick: I guess it was the ray guns, space ships, and pretty girls. That combination just worked out really nicely. When I was real young, I used to watch *Space Patrol* and *Tom Corbett, Space Cadet* on TV. And those were my very earliest s-f influences.

CBA: *Did you start drawing at a particular age?*

Nick: Well, I always drew. My grandparents, who I visited every Sunday, would give us a pile of papers and some pencils in order to keep us quiet. My brother, myself, and my cousin used to draw pictures all the time, and we would get all kinds of accolades for having drawn these magnificent pictures (which were actually pretty crude scribblings). But the point is we got accolades for them, so I always associated drawing with pats on the head. You know, "Atta, boys." [*laughter*] And so that's how I started drawing; I just kept on doing it. Then one day, I made a very startling discovery. My dad (who had always been a photographer) one day took out his portfolio. My brother and I, our mouths dropped open. We never knew our dad was an artist! We suddenly were just astonished looking over these pastel sketches of statues and nudes, and so forth, and discovered that this had always been our dad's secret passion. We then adopted that passion for quite a while. My brother eventually just abandoned it, but I just kept going.

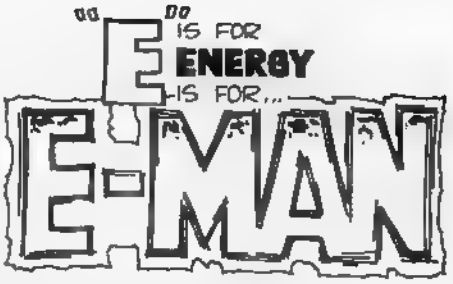
CBA: *Were you close with your father?*

Nick: Very close. My dad passed away Christmas, 1999. My dad, my mother, my brother, and I, we were a very close family.

CBA: *Were you all creative?*

Nick: I don't know about that. As I said, my brother eventually kind of drifted away from it. My dad always was. He always liked to fool with painting. He used to do the paint-by-numbers sets and did a beautiful job on them. Right up until his later years, he did wood carving, and the paint-by-number sets. My mother never seemed to be all that interested in art, though.

CBA: *Your father was a professional photographer?*



Left inset: *E is for excellence Perhaps Nick Cuti's most fondly-recalled Charlton creation, E-Man, developed with artist Joe Staton Here is the presentation art used to pitch the series to Charlton executives. ©2001 Joe Staton*

Below: *Nick, post Wally Wood, as the good Captain Cosmos. Today the artist/writer/editor is developing* Captain Cosmos, The Last Starveyer *a space opera adventure property. The immortal team of Cuti and Staton has even produced a comic book featuring Nick's concepts, though a film or television series is Nick's ultimate goal for his creation. ©2001 Raje Cola Productions. Courtesy of Nick Cuti*

place in the world at the time?

Nick: Pretty much, because my dad used to bring home *Life*, *Time*, every week, so I would always grab ahold of *Time*, especially, because it was my favorite enjoyed it even more than *Life*, and so kept abreast of current events that way Lately, I've drifted away from it. I use the TV now to keep me up on current events. But at the time, I used to read al the time about what was going on in the world, and so on My favorite section was "People," which was a small section of *Time* that eventually became its own magazine

CBA: *Did you have like-minded peers who were into science fiction and other genre material?*

Nick: Not that much in Brooklyn. I was kind of considered an odd-ball, but when I moved to Long Island, I ran across a guy named Bill Richards, who was an artist and also a bit of a tough guy He and I the one thing we shared was our love for art. We used to sit in the back of classes and sketch, try to outdo each other in our drawings. I would draw a person and he would try and draw a better person or I would draw a tree and he would try and draw a better tree and I would try to do a better tree than him. I encountered Bill about ten years after high school and he had turned into one heck of a very fine artist. I haven't seen Bill in maybe 40 years but when at last I saw him, he had really developed into an excellent artist

CBA: *What year did you move out to Long Island?*

Nick: I was 13 years old, so that had to have been 1957

CBA: *Was that quite a change since you moved to a suburban environment?*

Nick: Very much changed I went from city apartment buildings, which is the only type of environment knew to very a suburban setting a really nice l ttle town called Valley Stream in Long Island

CBA: *That was quite an age for you to move. Did it change your life to move, do you think?*

Nick: Yeah, I suppose so I'm not sure exactly how, but 'm sure it had a very subtle — It was more of an outdoor environment, and I became friends with young guys who loved to go camping and hunting I got my first rifle out on Long Island something that you would never have n Brooklyn In fact, even eventually bought a shotgun A whole bunch of us used to go out, shooting clay pigeons on Long Island

CBA: *Out there, with Bill Richards and others, did you have an interest in comic books particularly?*

Nick: I always read comics because I always loved them But I guess when I started high school,

Nick: A darkroom technician who developed pictures for *Life* magazine *Time*, and *Sports Illustrated* He worked at Rockefeller Center for Time Inc

CBA: *Did you ever visit him in the office?*

Nick: Oh, yeah I went there several times, just to watch him develop pictures

CBA: *Did the atmosphere interest you, being in an editorial situation there?*

Nick: Yeah the photography did I stil do a lot myself, mainly because it helps when I do illustration You go out and photograph backgrounds, models, and so forth. And then you always have a record, and whenever you need to do an illustration, you just take out your photographs and start working

CBA: *Your father was working during the Golden Age of Life?*

Nick: Absolutely I don't know f you know the story about the *Andrea Doria* and *The Stockholm* They were two ships that collided at sea, and for three days, I didn't see my father he slept at the office—because they were waiting for the photographers to bring in pictures of that disaster He slept and ate at the office, and whenever the pictures came in, he just got up and started developing them So for three days, I just didn't see him. When he came home, he told us al about it

CBA: *And so your father was exposed to a lot of wonderful photographers at Time Life?*

Nick: Oh, absolutely He knew Alfred Eisenstadt, Margaret Burke-White, and Gordon Parks, personally He actually had met the original seven Mercury astronauts. They came down to the offices because Ralph Moss, their official photographer, worked for *Life* magazine So my dad got to meet a lot of very famous people, and he had a lot of stories to tell My father was a great person

CBA: *As a family, were you up on current events, what was taking*

ODDBALL THE MAD COMPUTER!
TROGGIE WHY DO YOU SUPPOSE ODDBALL WANTS TO DISECT STARFLAKE ?
WELL, TROGGIE I GUESS THIS IS WHERE YOU LEAVE ME !
INSIDE THE COMPUTEROID
GASP! WHAT ARE YOU
I'M A BIT...
√3=3 THAT'S ALL I'M SUPPOSED TO KNOW BUT I'VE GOT AMBITION! I LEARN THINGS BEYOND MY CAPACITY! THAT IS FORBIDDEN BUT I WANT TO BE A BRAIN! I ALREADY KNOW A LOT OF THINGS I'M NOT SUPPOSED TO KNOW - LIKE WHO YOU ARE AND WHY YOU ARE HERE!
I SHOULDN'T TALK TO YOU. ODDBALL COULD HAVE ME CLIPPED! BUT IF YOU'LL TELL ME THINGS--I'LL BRING YOU TO YOUR SIS... OH! NO! HERE COMES A CLIPPER!

Above: *Nick Cuti's Moonchild strip from Weird Fantasies #1, 1972, a full-color underground comix book. The character also appeared in a three-issue mini series in 1992, published by Forbidden Fruit.* **Below:** *Nick's creation also received notice in Mark James Estren's 1974 book, A History of Underground Comics. This panel is from Moonchild Comics #3, 1970.*
©2001 Nicola Cuti

my mother gave away my comic book collection. And I never

CBA: *Moms always do that. [laughter]*

Nick: She gave away my *Space Patrol* comics, *Tom Corbett, Space Cadet*, and all the others. When we moved as a matter of fact, to Long Island and for some reason, I never renewed my collection. Not until recently, anyway.

So I just punched myself into what most high school kids go through. Sports. I was on the track team and was a discus thrower. And I never really got into comic books again until I was in the service—the same place which I found out my friend, Bill DuBay, may have gotten into comics. I was in the service and I was a voracious reader, reading everything I could get my hands on. After a while, when I couldn't get my hands on novels, I would grab comic books.

CBA: *So did you go when you were about 18?*

Nick: No, I actually went in much later. I went to college for a while. I didn't join the service until I was in my twenties because I went through about two-and-a half to three years of college.

CBA: *What were you studying in college?*

Nick: I started studying engineering. believe it or not. I was a big science fan from my very early years and so decided to go into engineering. And then I found out I had absolutely no head at all for mathematics. *[laughter]* And so, I rediscovered that it wasn't the mathematics of science I loved, it was the romance of science. I just envisioned myself creating all of these wonderful devices and inventions, and then I realized, well, it was the romance I loved so much. It must be science-fiction I really liked. So when I was in the service, I started reading comic books and one day, I read a *Creepy*. And I thought, "I can write stories like this." So I sat down and I wrote a science-fiction story and I sent it into Warren Publishing. And I was so astonished to get a letter back saying that my story was accepted and I got a check for it!

CBA: *All of $35?*

Nick: No, it was actually $25 if you really want to know *[laughter]*. Because that's how much Jim Warren was paying. $25 a story if you wrote a two-page story or a 30-page story.

CBA: *What year did you go into the service, roughly?*

Nick: I got out in '69, so it was about 1965 when I went into the service.

CBA: *And were you stationed stateside?*

Nick: I purposely put in for overseas. I wanted to go overseas. I wanted to travel so I was stationed—my first place I was stationed was at Toul Rosiers, France. And I was there for about a year. And then after that I was stationed in Cigli, Turkey. And I was there for about a year and I got to see Germany and Greece. And I was stationed in a really remote section of the world called Bangor, Maine.

CBA: *[laughs] That is remote!*

Nick: But the most amazing thing is a friend of mine, Bob Booth, and I used to go to this all-night Dunkin' Donut counter, and we used to have our donuts there and late night coffee around one o'clock in the morning. And the woman who used to serve us was this rather plump little lady by the name of Tabitha. And her name was Tabitha King, the wife of Stephen King. There was a guy in the corner who used to be writing in this corner booth at the donut area with black hair and he was always writing and we were very curious about him. We don't know for certain but we suspect that that was Stephen King.

CBA: *Right. Probably writing his story for Warren that got rejected. [laughter]*

Nick: Very possible. As a matter of fact, a close friend of mine, Marv Wolfman, was proud of the fact that he actually rejected Stephen King's stories when he would send them into *Creepy* and *Eerie*. There's an irony for you.

CBA: *Yeah. So you mailed Warren your first story, but did you want to pursue art or was it something that you pretty much passed on for a period of time?*

Nick: Well, that's a good question because I've always been interested in both art and writing. I never really had a formal training in art, though I did take some art courses in college but never really took any professional courses in art. And so my great love was art but I never felt I was really good enough to make a living at it. And so I very often would sustain myself as a writer while training myself in art.

CBA: *And did you have a creative writing background or was it something you had a natural knack for?*

Nick: Yeah. I was always a natural storyteller. In fact, flashing back to Brooklyn, I actually used to get our gangs together by telling stories. The one thing that even the toughest of people would always love to hear are stories. And so I would actually appease the opposing gang by sitting down and telling a story that I had made up. It would save me from getting beaten up very often. And eventually I got to know the guys who I told stories to. They'd want to hear more and more stories. And so, that's how a lot of peace conferences occurred.

CBA: *[laughter] What kind of stories did you recall saying?*

Nick: Science-fiction stories and I got interested in horror stories much later. Horror had always frightened me and I used to keep away from it. But later I became more and more fascinated by horror. The first story I ever sold to Jim Warren was called "Grub." Tom Sutton, who I still keep in contact with, was the one who illustrated it.

CBA: *That was your first professional job?*

Nick: My first professional job. Exactly.

CBA: *Was Jim serving as editor at the time or was Bill Parente there?*

Nick: Well, Jim, of course, was the publisher but if I'm not mistaken I think Jim was serving as editor at the time, acting as publisher/

editor

I think Archie Goodwin, one of the nicest men and professional people I'd ever met, was leaving at the time. Jim was sort of in-between and then later, Bill Parente did come on as editor. And I worked for Bill, who was also an extremely nice person and very, very professional.

CBA: *And did John Cochran come in after Bill Parente?*

Nick: I think Cochran was sort of there. I think he must have come in after Bill Parente. And then later Bill DuBay came in. But, unfortunately, I didn't work for Warren at that time.

CBA: *Well, you were quite busy with another publisher, right?*

Nick: Another publisher, exactly. [*chuckles*] But later, Bill and I became good friends. Bill was responsible for me coming out to California.

CBA: *How long did you freelance for Warren?*

Nick: For quite a while. From 1965 until his demise.

CBA: *Really?*

Nick: Yeah, I was always sending stories to Warren. I loved his company and I liked Jim Warren an awful lot in spite of some problems that we had. I actually sued him one time in court. In spite of the lawsuit, I owe him a great deal. I owe him my career. He, more than anyone else, helped me achieve whatever status I have in the comic books industry.

CBA: *Did you come back to New York when you left the service?*

Nick: Yeah. As a matter of fact, I was still living on Long Island with my folks but I used to go to New York quite a bit because I was interested in continuing working for Warren. I met Wally Wood at the time. I had been at one of Phil Seuling's conventions, and bought this portfolio of Wally Wood stuff. And in the back was a phone number where you could reach Wally Wood. And I figured, 'Well, it's an old portfolio, chances are this phone number is no good. But I'll give it a try." Now, Wally Wood was one of the gods of my childhood. I thought he was, by far, the greatest comic book artist who ever lived. And so I figured here was an opportunity to, *maybe*, talk to him on the phone. Chances are it was no good, but I decided to give it a try anyway. So I phoned the number, and I get this real quiet voice saying, "Hello." I said, "Hi. I'd like to speak to Wally Wood." And the voice said, "Speaking." Suddenly it struck me, I was talking to one of my gods! And I said, "Mr. Wood, I'd like to show you my portfolio." He said, "Oh, yeah. Oh, okay. Sure, I'd love to see it. Bring it down." And he gave me the address and so forth. And I gathered a whole bunch of my scribblings together and I brought it down to him. And he looked at them... very, very nice, didn't tear into me the way I probably deserved to be, and picked out a character in my portfolio, rather buxom little space gal that I called Moonchild. And he says, "Why don't you develop a comic strip around her and I'll publish it in *witzend* magazine?" So I did and went home and I drew up this character, Moonchild, and did a comic strip and brought her over to him. At the time, Al Williamson was visiting with him and I got to meet the great Al Williamson. And so they looked at my character and Wood said, "Yeah, I'd publish this in *witzend*, but I sold it to Bill Pearson." And my heart dropped. And I brought Moonchild to Bill Pearson and he hated Moonchild. But in spite of that fact, Bill Pearson and I became very good friends. In fact, we still correspond and talk to each other over the phone in spite the fact that he's in Arizona. And when I left Charlton, I recommended Bill to replace me. And he worked at Charlton for many years as my replacement. As I said, we still remain friends.

CBA: *You did a lot of entertaining comic books. You obviously worked with one of the—actually, he could be characterized as comics' pre-eminent entertainer, in a way: Wally Wood.*

Nick: Oh, Wally Wood was the best.

CBA: *He understood comics, understood the look of comics, and definitely understood the power of comics.*

Nick: I would say he was one of the biggest influences on comics because he had a slew of imitators and admirers. And I would consider him to be always my favorite. I think I first picked up a Wally Wood comic when I was about seven years old and at that age, I recognized the fact that this guy was a genius and I kept looking for his comics over and over again.

CBA: *You know, you look at Woody's work as an assist on* The Spirit *and then you look at the* Mad *comics stuff, he just made a leap.*

STRANGE THERE'S LOTS OF PLANT LIFE, SO THERE MUST BE ANIMAL LIFE AS WELL...
BUT SO FAR WE'VE SEEN NO SIGN OF IT!
LOOK! SKELETONS!
THIS ONE LOOKS ALMOST HUMANOID. WE MAY RUN INTO INTELLIGENT LIFE
NOTHING BUT BONES... THIS WHOLE WORLD IS A GRAVE-YARD!
SIR! COME HERE! QUICK!
A SPACE SHIP!
AND MORE BONES. WELL, THAT'S ENOUGH FOR TODAY!
WE'LL CAMP HERE BY THIS LAKE...
DON, YOU'LL STAND THE FIRST WATCH!

Above: *Though solely credited to Wally Wood, the Warren story "The Cosmic All" was a Wood/Cuti collaboration (in* Creepy *#38). Nick not only served as an assistant to Woody during the late 1960s, but he also was an editor at Warren Publishing for a period in the early '70s. Comic Book Artist interviewed Nick about his Warren tenure, which will be published in the forthcoming* The Warren Companion, *due this Summer. ©2001 the respective copyright holder.*

Nick: Oh, absolutely. But even his work on *The Spirit* was incredible. I have copies of that and that was just mind boggling, some of the best. Well, it was Woody's style. I mean, you could pick it right out. You knew where Eisner ended and Wood began. I mean, Eisner was a brilliant, brilliant storyteller and an excellent draftsman. But Wood had that kind of three-dimensional soundness and to this day, I've always preferred small, dark places mainly because of the Wally Wood spaceships. I just became so enamored. Everything was so tight and claustrophobic in all of his spaceships and they were always so cluttered with gadgets and whatnot. [chuckles] And if you see my apartment, that's basically what it's like.

CBA: *[laughs] Everything's in focus, everything's so sharp.*

Nick: Right. Everything is right nearby.

CBA: *It's a sensory overload.*

Nick: I even have a Wally Wood spaceship in my apartment where I filmed *Captain Cosmos*. It's taken up my entire dining room. [*laughs*] I have a spaceship built into my dining room and it's a Wally Wood spaceship.

CBA: *[chuckles] Really? It's got all Woody's knobs and all that?*

Nick: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. I think I might have sent you a photo of it.

CBA: *You should have Early American or something, I don't know. "Wally Wood is my decorator." [laughs]*

Nick: I guess you'd have to say that. He had a tremendous influence on me because of the way he used to draw. Not that I imitate.

CBA: *You do get into very highly-detailed work with some of your*

NOW, THE LAST OF THE CURSHAW LINE HAS DISCOVERED THE MANSION! DR. LEWIS CURSHAW AND HIS WIFE WEREN'T MUCH LIKE THEIR PREDECESSORS....
MOST PEOPLE SCOFF AT THE EXISTENCE OF PARANORMAL EXISTENCE BUT I DISAGREE! IN OUR OWN INVESTIGATIONS OF THE OCCULT, WE'VE DISCOVERED EVIDENCE OF SPIRITUAL ACTIVITY!
LIKE WOW! NO WONDER NO ONE WANTS TO SLEEP THERE, LEW! IS IT REALLY HAUNTED?
NONBELIEVERS IN THE CURSHAW CURSE HAD DARED ENTER THIS OLD PLACE...BUT WHY SHOULD TWO PEOPLE WHO KNEW WHAT AWAITED THEM VENTURE INSIDE?
THEN YOU BELIEVE THE CURSHAW MANSION IS HAUNTED BY....
COLEMAN CURSHAW, WITHOUT A DOUBT.. AND, FROM THE ACCOUNTS OF THE GENTLEMAN'S VICTIMS, HE HAD A HOST OF DEMONS TO ASSIST HIM!
LEW, KNOW HOW MONEY IS INVOLVED B BUT ARE YOU SURE
WE NEED THAT GORGEOUS BREAD BABY AND WE'LL HAVE IT IF WE SPEND THE NEXT TWELVE HOURS UNDER THIS ROOF!

Above: *Just a superb Sanho Kim penciled, inked & lettered Charlton mystery page written by Nick Cuti Sorry but we can't identify the story though Kim's exquisite linework is sorely missed this days! (Where for art thou, Sanho?) Repro'd from the original art. Courtesy of Nick Cuti ©2001 the respective copyright holder*

Moonchild stuff

Nick: Oh absolutely. And that's because of Woody. The detail is because of him. Even when I design backgrounds for animated cartoons, I have to stop myself because become so enthralled with the detail work that I forget that I've got to stop and go on to another illustration or I'll lose money or get fired.

CBA: *Alex Toth, who is not a detail kind of guy he's more of an*

Nick: He's the opposite.

CBA: *impressionistic kind of guy, but he gets it so succinctly, he's as slick as Wood can be.*

Nick: Oh, absolutely. Toth is also brilliant in just the opposite way. I look at Toth's panels and I say, "Wow." He's got almost nothing there but it works. You can see, you get the whole picture. There's an airplane flying through the sky and it's a dino attacking the village. But if you really look at it, there isn't much there. And to be able to create that feeling and impression with an absolute minimum amount of work is impressive, too. It involves a tremendous genius for design that makes it work. And Wood doesn't have that genius for design. Toth does, but Woody's brilliance comes from the detail.

CBA: *God is in the detail for Woody. I would always argue amongst my friends that he was a great technician of comics and he had his own manias that he brought to it, especially in the science-fiction. You know, the writhing creature, all consuming. [laughs]*

Nick: I still have nightmares with his creatures. [*laughs*] They were so beautifully disgusting.

CBA: *They were so '50s! So perfect of that time. Moonchild did get published, right? In about 1970?*

Nick: Yeah, she got published. In fact, she was, just not too long ago published in a three-issue series of her own magazine.

CBA: *Gary Arlington published the original issues?*

Nick: Right. The magazine was called *Weird Fantasies*, and it was in the same magazine as Rich Corben and a few others.

CBA: *That was a color underground, right?*

Nick: Yes. I think it might have been the only, or the first, color underground magazine ever published.

CBA: *When I first spoke to you when I was a young punk in the early '70s, I knew you only from Moonchild. Recently, I was thinking, "How did I get exposed to Moonchild?" And it had to have been through that comic book.*

Nick: That's exactly right. At the time, I was working with Wally Wood and you'd probably see a strong Wally Wood influence in Moonchild. What happened was Mark Estren, who was publishing a book on underground comics, had called Wally Wood (who used to like to be called "Woody," and never liked to be called "Wally") Woody didn't want to give a long interview to Estren, so he said, "Well, my assistant does a lot of underground comix. Why don't you talk to him?" That was me. And so got on the phone with Estren and I gave him an interview which was published in the book. I told him about Moonchild which I eventually sent to Gary Arlington and he published in his *Weird Fantasies* comic book.

CBA: *What was your first connection with Charlton?*

Nick: Oh, Charlton? Okay. Well, what happened was, I had always been connected with Warren, right up until its demise. I was working with Woody at the studio and I discovered I really couldn't live on $20 a week. So there was an artist who used to come down to the studio to visit by the name of Tony Tallarico. And he was attached to Charlton. And one day, he came into the studio and said, "Nick, you know, they're looking for an assistant editor at Charlton." Sal Gentile, who had been the editor at Charlton, was being bumped up to magazines. And his assistant, George Wildman, had taken over as the editor of comics. And George was looking for an assistant. And Tony said, "Why don't you apply?" So I thought, "Yeah. Sure. The opportunity to be working as an assistant editor at a comic book company? Sure." So I called up George Wildman and he offered to interview me in New York City. And I drove down to New York City and I arrived at the city twenty minutes early for our appointment. And I thought, "Oh boy, no problem." Well, I got stuck in traffic and the traffic locked me in so that I was moving at about a half-hour to drive one block. So I arrived at the appointment that I was originally twenty minutes early, I wound up being two hours late. George waited for me, interviewed me and I was hired.

So now I had to move to Connecticut. Remember, had been living on Long Island and Connecticut was a pretty frightening experience. You know what I mean, to move to this little New England state that I was completely unfamiliar with. But I managed to find an apartment and I moved to Connecticut and started working at Charlton under George Wildman.

CBA: *Do you recall what kind of pay you were getting?*

Nick: It was about $200 a week, which, at the time, was not bad considering I was making $20 a week for Woody.

CBA: *When you had your first meeting with George, what were your job responsibilities going to be?*

Nick: Basically, I was the production department, myself and another guy by the name of Frank Bravo. And the two of us were the production department. And the two of us were it. I was the assistant editor, and Frank was just under me. The two of us handled the entire production department which meant that when artists would send in completed stories, we would look over the artwork, proofread it, and if there were any spelling mistakes, we corrected them. And if there were any pieces of artwork that had to be corrected for one reason or another, we would do that.

At the time, the Comics Code was very strong, and so we would send our artwork to the Comics Code for approval by Len Darvin. And then it would come back and they would sometimes ask

for changes. It was up to the production department—Frank Bravo and myself—to make all the changes.

CBA: *Any memorable incidences with the Code?*

Nick: Mostly, a lot of it had to do with bikinis being too brief or certain scenes being too frightening for children because we did a lot of horror comics. Or war comics that were a little bit too graphic for kids. And too bloody, or something like that. So we would change that sort of thing.

CBA: *Were you familiar with the Charlton comics line before you went for the interview?*

Nick: Oh sure. Everyone had heard of Charlton. I used to pick up *Captain Atom* and the *Blue Beetle* from time to time. And Pete Morisi did a lot of super-heroes. I used to like Morisi's work a lot.

CBA: *Was it true he was a police officer by day?*

Nick: A police officer. Which, by the way, is what I did in the service. I was in the Air Police for four years in the service. I met Pete Morisi a few times. A very nice guy. And he signed his work "PAM." I guess those were his initials, including his middle name which I never knew what it was.

CBA: *Did you get a lot of freelancers coming into the office?*

Nick: Oh, a lot. One of the freelancers was a "hack" by the name of Steve Ditko. [*laughter*] And I use the word "hack" in quotes because he was anything but. Steve is one of the greats of the industry.

CBA: *So he came up to Derby? Where was he living at the time?*

Nick: Well, I think he was living in New York, but he did come to Derby a few times, but I had met Steve at Woody's studio. Steve and Woody were friends. Steve is an extremely nice person, and an extremely talented artist. I don't even have to say that, really, because he's a legend in the industry. But he also had the ability to turn out work at a tremendous pace. You would hand him a script and he'd have the finished script *beautifully* done within a short, short time. He was very, very fast.

CBA: *Looking at your work at Charlton, you are a naturally gifted editor. You had a pool of talent that was eclectic and diverse and able to put out a lot and getting little in return.*

Nick: Well, Steve Ditko is a perfect example. He's one of the top artists in the business and he enjoyed working for Charlton and was always one of the regulars.

CBA: *Did you talk to him with any regularity on the phone?*

Nick: Sort of. I met him for the first time over at Wood's studio because he and Woody were friends. He came down to the studio just for a visit, just to hang out. He came in from New York and Wood's studio was in Long Island. He was very relaxed. We chatted. Woody showed him that Wizard King he had been working on. Later, when I went to work at Charlton, he came into the studio several times, always a very affable, very nice man.

CBA: *Did you remember your conversation with Ditko?*

Nick: Basically, I had picked him up from the train station and we were driving back to the studio and he remarked to me, "What's the name of this town?" And I says, "It's Valley Stream." And he says, "You know, Nick, we've been driving for a while and I haven't seen a single stream." [*laughs*] So I says, "Well yeah, there's not one near the highway, Steve." [*laughs*] That was my initial conversation with Steve that I can recall.

CBA: *With the literalist. [laughs] You obviously used Ditko at Charlton with some frequency. Interestingly, some of the art that I'm going to return to you, obviously, that you sent me, was alternative panels of a Steve Ditko story. One, apparently, could easily surmise it was a code reject, that it was, maybe, a little too terrifying. It was a woman, I think she had a telephone in the foreground. She was being tormented by a huge, evil spirit with a typically hysterical Ditko face.*

Nick: Charlton, for some reason, was very heavily censored. We used to have arguments with Len Darvin [*at the Comics Code Authority*] about that because we would pick up, say, a Marvel comic and find something that was many times more offensive than things being censored in *our* comics. We sent some very angry letters to Len about that but I have a feeling that Darvin looked upon Marvel Comics as being more for the older kids and Charlton being for the younger kids. And that was the reason we were more heavily censored, I guess.

CBA: *But that's more prejudicial, no matter what. Did you argue in person with Len?*

Nick: No, that was more George's responsibility. He's the editor and it's his position to do that sort of thing. I could contribute. Like, I would point out things to George, and all that, but it was up to him, what to say to Len Darvin.

CBA: *It must have been interesting at Warren, to be outside the Code.*

Nick: Oh, I'd prefer it, obviously. When I worked at Charlton, I worked within the Code because I had no choice. Also, I'm a big believer in no censorship for adults. Adults should be allowed to go after anything they're interested in, but I do believe in censorship for children. Children's minds are being developed and you don't want to just shovel offensive material at a child. And so I didn't object to the Code. I felt it had a very important place there. But as a writer and as an artist, of course I wanted to push the boundaries.

CBA: *Did George Wildman maintain that New York office all throughout the time?*

Nick: No, he was up in Connecticut. I never knew he had a New York office.

CBA: *I mean you met George down in the New York office, right?*

Nick: I'd forgotten why there was an office there, but it had nothing to do with George or Charlton. I think it was just a friend's office that

Below: *As is typical of Charlton freelancers, artist Tom Sutton penciled, inked and lettered this Nick Cuti-scripted Charlton page from an unidentified mystery title. Ain't she a beaut? Reproduced from the original art. Courtesy of Nick Cuti. ©2001 the respective copyright holder.*

AND THE PRINCE'S NAME WAS HARVARD. HE LIVED LONG AGO IN THE KINGDOM OF MURR AND LIKE ALL YOUNG PRINCES WHO HAD REACHED THEIR EIGHTEENTH BIRTHDAY HE WAS IN SEARCH OF A QUEST — A DRAGON TO SLAY OR PERHAPS HE HAD FOUND THE GOAL OF HIS SEARCH IN ...
POWER MAIDEN
I CAN SEE HER, CHARGER, SHE'S FAR AWAY BUT HER BEAUTY RADIATES A GLOW I CAN FEEL FROM HERE.
EDITOR . . GEORGE WILDMAN
WRITER NICOLA CUTI
ARTIST. . TOM SUTTON
I MUST HAVE HER. FROM THIS DAY I PROMISE THAT THERE WILL BE NO OTHER WOMAN FOR ME BUT HER!
SHE CAN BE YOURS, BOY, IF YOU'RE WILLING TO FIGHT FOR HER.
HAHH
WAHA! WHERE DID YOU COME FROM?

WHAT'S REAL AND WHAT'S FANTASY? DOCTORS TELL US THAT SO LONG AS WE KNOW THE DIFFERENCE WE ARE SAFE BUT AS HARLEY MUNSON WILL SOON DISCOVER, SOMETIMES REALITY IS JUST A MATTER OF DIMENSION
BWORZZZRT!!
DR FRAKIS CHANGED INTO THAT HORRIBLE THING!
NO, HE'S BEEN DEAD ALL ALONG A VENUSIAN IN DISGUISE LED US INTO THIS TRAP!
THREE DIMENSION MOVIES HAD A SHORT LIFE SPAN, DUE TO EYE STRAIN... BUT PERHAPS THE TRUE CAUSE OF THEIR DEMISE WAS MIND STRAIN
GOLLY
EDITOR-GEORGE WILDMAN
SCRIPT-NICOLA CUTI
ART-JOE STATON
D-6112
WASN'T THAT GREAT?! DIDN'T THAT LOOK REAL?!
YOU'VE SEEN THAT MOVIE EIGHT TIMES. IT'S JUST A CHILDISH SCIENCE FICTION FEATURE
FOR A CHILDISH MIND.

Above: *Perhaps the most important Charlton creative team in the 1970s, writer Nick Cuti and artist Joe Staton collaborated on many horror, romance, and science fiction stories. Here's the splash page to their "Film Freak" story. Reproduced from the original art. Courtesy of Nick Cuti ©2001 the respective copyright holder*

he was using as a sort of in-between place

CBA: *Oh! I thought because Dick had established a New York office to deal with freelancers when he was editor between '65 and '68. I'd thought that was a continuation of that policy, to maintain a hole in the wall in the city, so to speak.*

Nick: George could probably tell you a lot more accurately why there was that New York office.

CBA: *So Steve was obviously mailing in his work?*

Nick: Yeah, but he did come into the office from time to time. And whenever he'd come into Charlton, he'd come over to my little section and chat with me. A very, very personable guy, very likeable.

CBA: *Did you ever wonder why he was doing work for Charlton, which was the lowest paying outfit in the industry?*

Nick: I couldn't swear to it, but I think he might have started there and Charlton always had a good policy of payment. They would pay their people on time. They weren't the highest-paying company in the world, far from it. But they were steady. In other words, you always knew that you had a job there if you needed it. And you always knew that you would get paid on time. Which a lot of other companies, unfortunately, weren't always able to do that.

CBA: *Right. And you guys put out a lot of books, right?*

Nick: Well, you see, at the time, just about all of the comic book companies—Marvel, DC—were putting out super heroes, exclusively. Charlton was probably one of the very few companies that was still putting out comics in different subject areas. We put out Westerns, war, horror, romance. So if you wanted something besides super heroes, the only place you could go was Charlton.

CBA: *Do you remember specific meetings of "Okay, we're gonna do a super hero; now's the time"?*

Nick: Yeah, George did that. The publisher would have a meeting and get together with all his editors and they'd discuss the different magazines. They published Western magazines, *Hit Parader*, a lot of different magazines. And George always sat in on that because he was the editor of the comics. One day he came back and said, "Nick, I talked to the publishers into doing a super-hero. Now come up with one." And so I came up with *E-Man* and Joe Gill came up with *Yang* because at the time, that TV show with David Carradine—*Kung Fu*—was very popular.

CBA: *How come you guys didn't come up with a swamp creature? [laughs]*

Nick: With a swamp creature? [*laughs*]

CBA: *Everybody else had! DC had Swamp Thing, Marvel had Man Thing, Atlas/Seaboard had The Bog Beast, even Skywald had The Heap. Swamp monsters were coming out of every publisher except, oddly enough, the house who had Tom Sutton! [laughter]*

Nick: I know. I have no idea why we didn't do it but we didn't. We were just too worried because there were enough swamp creatures at the time, and I guess we probably figured, what were we going to come up with that's gonna be different?

CBA: *Did you see yourself, in a matter of fact, giving some credence to Len Darvin's point of view about Charlton? Did you see yourself, possibly, as having a younger audience than either DC or Marvel?*

Nick: No, because we *did* have a line for children. You know, the *Pebbles & Bamm Bamm*, *Wheelie and the Chopper Bunch*, *The Flintstones*. But the other stuff, the ghost stuff, the war stuff, the Westerns and so forth, I just thought they were geared toward the older kids.

CBA: *Did you look at the competition? Did you look at Joe Kubert's war comics or Joe Orlando's mystery books?*

Nick: Yeah, I thought we were competitive with them. I thought so, yeah.

CBA: *Did you produce material in reaction to what Marvel was doing, for instance? E-Man is coming out as a super-hero strip while Marvel was featuring these very testostrenated, gritting teeth Jim Starlin kind of cosmic super heroes, and you come out with a virtual modern-day Plastic Man.*

Nick: Yeah, and that was on purpose. There were two things that Marvel did. One was, of course, their straight super-hero line which I always kind of resented because of the fact that they were taking over the entire industry. I think I've mentioned this before and I'm probably going to get a lot of angry mail about it but when I was a kid, super heroes were just a small percentage of the entire industry. And when I finally got into the industry, as a professional, they had taken over. There were super-heroes and about 10% was horror, science fiction, and romance, etc.

CBA: *Were you blatantly ignoring the Charlton "Action Hero" legacy?*

Nick: Like the Blue Beetle? Thunderbolt and all that? Well, that was before my time, anyway, at Charlton.

CBA: *But I mean they were characters owned by the company. You could revive them. How did you look at them? Did you look at them as an option or were they never considered?*

Nick: I never considered them because I was too involved in creating my own super-hero. George never brought it up.

CBA: *People must've said, "Why don't you get Steve Ditko to do another Question story?"*

Nick: Steve was interested in doing his own super hero. He came up with a character called Killjoy which we featured in the back of *E-Man*.

CBA: *Actually very well-drawn. Was Steve anxious to get Killjoy into his own book?*

Nick: Yeah, but none of the characters we premiered in the back of *E-Man* got their own book because *E-Man* died, and that ended the super hero line at Charlton for a second time—or third—time.

CBA: *Those little back-up stories are neat little treasures because they're done by such an eclectic crew of creators. I think Steve Ditko dominates there with three strips. Tom Sutton did a spy strip*

Nick: "The Bishop," I remember. And then Wayne Howard and I did a time traveler.

CBA: *Right, for two episodes.*

Nick: And of course, the one that was most popular was "Rog-2000" that John Byrne did. And that would have probably, eventually gotten a book of its own if we had continued super-heroes.

CBA: *So there was a day when it just got shut down?*

Nick: Yeah. One day, George came back from one of those famous publisher's meetings and they said that they were going to drop *E-Man* after the tenth issue. He said that they only kept it going because I was writing it and they felt a loyalty to me. But they said that it just was not selling, it didn't take off and so they decided to end it.

CBA: *In 1972, there were 12 romance titles while all the other publishers were phasing out their romance lines.*

Nick: Well, basically, the reason is because, you know, comics is basically a boys' medium. Boys are the ones who buy comics. I'd say about 80% of the comic audience—I'm just guessing at the percentage—but I'd say anywhere from 80-90% of all comic buyers were boys. The one comic that was almost a 100% bought by girls was romance. So when girls wanted comics, that was basically it. The romance line. And since the other comic book companies catered to the 80%, Charlton catered to everybody. And you got to hand it to them for doing that. They kept a lot of categories alive that had just about faded away. They did space opera, Westerns, romance, war.

CBA: *What was the genesis of* Haunted Love?

Nick: The way that worked out is that we had two genres: The ghost genre, which almost had 100% boy readership, and we had the love comics, almost 99% girl readership. And I don't recall who it was—whether it was George Wildman, our publisher, or whoever, who said, "You know, gothic romances are real big right now. So why don't we combine our two genres, ghosts and romance, and come up with a sort of gothic romance title?" And so we came up with *Haunted Love*. As it turned out, instead of combining our two audiences, we wound up alienating *both* audiences. *[laughter]* So the boys wouldn't touch it because of the romance aspect and the girls wouldn't touch it because of the horror aspect. Just goes to show you: Don't combine genres like Westerns and s-f or whatever because there's a specific group for each and there's a reason for the segregation. We learned the hard way. It died a miserable death.

CBA: *Just no overlap of those demographics?*

Nick: Exactly.

CBA: *Your more sensitive fanboys out there now consider that quite a find because Charlton actually committed to gothic romance for a relatively long period of time.* Haunted Love *came out with nine issues, which blew out any other record of the other publishers for that amount of books in the category.*

Nick: Yeah, I think even DC tried it for a while.

CBA: *Well, they're the ones who kick started it. They got into Gothic pretty thick and you guys came out late but you lasted a long time.*

Nick: Well, they were all very well-done issues. I wrote some of my best stories for the title and I know some of the artists did some of their best artwork. It was just the whole idea that you can't always combine genres and expect to combine audiences.

CBA: *Do you recall any titles of favorite stories?*

Nick: "The Eternal Teacher," I remember was a really good one in which this man was hired to teach a young girl who forgot everything every time she went to sleep. So he would have to teach her over and over again and the only way that would be possible was the fact that he fell in love with her. Because she would wind up being a genius by the end of the day because she picked up things really fast but as soon as she fell asleep, her slate would be wiped clean. Joe Staton illustrated that and it was one of my favorites.

CBA: *It was great when there was some experimentation with genre. Too bad it failed. I'm surprised you're so emphatic about it.*

Nick: Oh, failure is nothing to be ashamed of. Just the attempt, alone some of the greatest classics were failures during their own period. Vincent Van Gogh sold one painting in his lifetime and that was to his brother. Now his paintings go for millions of dollars so, you know what I mean? An attempt and a failure is no big thing.

CBA: Haunted Love *lasted for 11 issues, right? For a bi-monthly title, that's almost two years. When Charlton committed to a book, was it hard to stop?*

Nick: I'll tell you right now, it had nothing to do with "hard to stop." Charlton just didn't care. Their comic book line was there specifically to keep the machines going. They had to keep their presses going 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They only stopped their presses twice a year to clean them. And that was it. Otherwise, they had to keep the presses going. They were huge presses and if they ever stopped them, it was very costly to break down, and very costly to start up again. So, to them, the comics were just a way of keeping the presses going. They could care less about the titles. The people who cared about the titles were the people in the editorial department. So unless a title did very badly, Charlton could care less about what they were printing. And I'm talking about the top publishers, not the people in the editorial division. So that's why *Haunted Love* lasted as long as it did because of the fact that it really wasn't selling from the very beginning. Our first few issues had very low sales runs. We probably would have dropped them after three issues. We just kept them going, hoping they would eventually catch on, which they never did, of course.

CBA: *How involved were you with the characterization of the hosts of the horror titles?*

Nick: Well, the original hosts had absolutely nothing to do with. That was, I believe, Joe Gill who came up with most of the original hosts. Then George Wildman was trying to give a new look to the horror line.

CBA: *With the painted covers.*

Nick: Right, with painted covers and he suggested we

Left inset: *Another job requirement of the assistant editor position was to compose the text stories in any given Charlton comic, a requirement at the time for the titles to maintain second class mailing status. Here's a Tom Sutton illustration to one of Nick Cuti's text stories, courtesy of Nick. ©2001 the respective copyright holder.*

Below: *While the industry as a whole began to return original artwork to the artists in the mid-1970s, Charlton initiated the practice of actually shredding the boards, apparently insisting they could do with the art as they wished. During one visit to the shredder, Nick Cuti was able to salvage these two superb Steve Ditko panels from an unidentified Charlton horror story. Courtesy of Nick. ©2001 the respective copyright holder.*

Above: *Nick included this great Joe Staton drawing of E-Man, Nova and fuzzy friend—looking like a First Comics-era rendition to ye ed but what do I know? Nick considered Mike Mauser and E-Man, both Charlton alumni, to be his favorite characters to script. Courtesy of Nick Cuti. ©2001 Joe Staton.*

Below: *Whether Nick, Joe or George, somebody coined a now-household phrase to head the E-Man letter column, years before the Internet swept the globe by storm, back in 1973! E-Man ©2001 Joe Staton.*

come up with some new hosts. Joe came up with a few. He came up with Countess Blood. And then I came up with Colonel Whiteshroud, the Monster Hunter. (At the time, Darren McGavin was on TV playing *Kolchak, the Night Stalker*, and that was very popular, and I thought, "Hey let's do something like that.") And then I came up with Baron Werewulf. Baron Werewulf's *Haunted Library*.

CBA: *They became signature characters for the artists that designed them. Don Newton doing Baron Werewulf. And did he have a hand in with the Colonel?*

Nick: I'm not sure. I think Joe Staton designed the look of the Colonel although I wouldn't swear to that.

CBA: *Actually, there was an entire issue which you wrote devoted to the Colonel.*

Nick: That was the werewolf issue.

CBA: *Drawn by a newcomer from Florida.*

Nick: Mike Zeck. I'm very proud to say I gave Mike some of his first professional work in the business. He was sending in two or three pages of samples and I just fell in love with his work. I thought it was just so solid and so fascinating. I showed them to George and he wasn't all that thrilled with Mike's work and I asked him, "Well can't we just send him some scripts just to see what he does with them?" George said no. Then George went on vacation. (I hope George isn't going to be mad at me when he hears this story.) [*laughs*] Before he left, he gave me a stack of scripts and says, "Here, send these out to different artists." And that was his mistake because I sent a whole bunch of them to Mike Zeck. [*laughs*] Well, when Mike's stories came in, George was furious, just for the fact that I'd pulled a fast one on him. (I told you I was a really snot-nosed kid at the time.) [*laughs*] And he wouldn't fire me for a thing like that but he was really ready to do something. [*laughs*] Then he started looking at the stories and he called me over and he says, "You know, Nick. This kid isn't bad. Send him a few more." So George was a very big man to have, number one, swallowed his pride and admit that he was wrong and I very much admire him for doing that.

CBA: *Well, Zeck went on.*

Nick: Well, actually, Mike came over from Florida. He came to Connecticut and had no place to stay so my wife and I invited him to stay with us. And he stayed over at our house for a few weeks until he was able to find a place of his own.

CBA: *Did you introduce him to Woody?*

Nick: Oh, sure. I introduced him because Woody and I were friends at the time.

CBA: *Were you always advising Woody on assistants and what not?*

Nick: I didn't advise him on anything. Woody was a genius on his own. He didn't need advice from me.

CBA: *Oh, I mean to say that he was always within the community of cartoonists at all times, that he could spot new talent? I mean he obviously spotted talent in you, right? He hired you as an assistant.*

Nick: I think it was more that he took pity on me.

CBA: *[laughs] Really?*

Nick: I think so.

CBA: *Oh, come on. He knew you were a writer, right?*

Nick: Oh, he liked me as a writer but definitely not as an artist.

CBA: *I mean, you could contribute; you weren't a welfare case.*

Nick: Oh, no.

CBA: *You could pull your own and you did. Did you like the work you were seeing coming across your desk?*

Nick: Oh, yeah. Oh, absolutely. I loved working at Charlton. It gave me an opportunity to write because I was never into super-heroes. Later when I worked at DC Comics, my status went from, you know being like, "Oh, wow! Nick Cuti is coming to work at DC Comics" to "How can we get rid of Nick Cuti?" [*laughter*] And mainly because I was never into super-heroes.

CBA: *So you weren't a continuity freak?*

Nick: No! I like the other stuff a lot more than I did super-heroes. I feel very low with super-heroes. It's not that I have anything against super-heroes but they're just a genre as far as I'm concerned, and a good genre. But they've taken over, and that's the only objection I've had with them. When I was a kid, I read *Batman* and *Superman*, just like everyone else but not exclusively. They were just one of the things. I also read *Lone Ranger* and *Captain Video* and a whole bunch of other stuff. They were just one part of the whole thing.

CBA: *Did you feel that, at the time, Charlton had a bad reputation in comics fandom? Did you feel they were underrated?*

Nick: I think they were. I think they were very underrated. Now, in all honesty, the only reason that John Santangelo, the publisher, kept a comic book line was because he had these enormous presses, these four-color presses, which he used to publish all his magazines, okay? And these presses were only shut down twice a year to be cleaned okay? So in other words, for 24 hours a day 365 days a year, with the exception of two days, those presses were running continuously. He had to have a continuous line of magazines to run. One of the magazine lines he ran were comics. So we were there, purely to keep the presses running.

CBA: *So he had three shifts running around the clock?*

Nick: Oh yeah. The presses were never shut down, except twice a year.

CBA: *Were you generally working nine-to-five?*

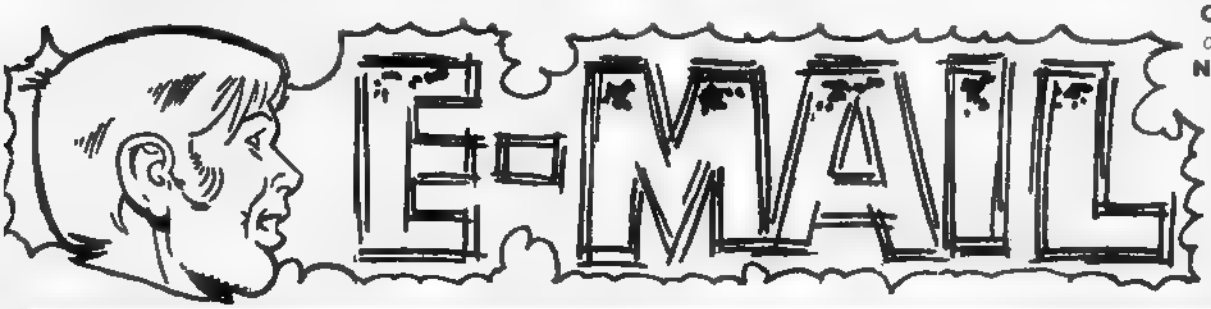
Nick: Yeah, but there were shifts in the pressroom working all day long. You know, graveyard shifts, swing shifts, etc., day shift, but there was always a shift running the presses. And comics were just a means to keep his presses going. That's all he looked at them as. He wasn't concerned about what went into the comics.

CBA: *When you first arrived at Charlton, were the offices at the plant?*

Nick: I was at the plant. We had a little corner office.

CBA: *Did you get a tour of the operation?*

Nick: Oh, sure, I was always going down. Part of my job was delivering the comics to the plant, where they were being published. I would take the actual artwork, and go downstairs to where the plant was, and would hand the original pages to the photographers who would photograph them, make



negatives out of them, and then make plates out of them, and then put those plates on the presses

CBA: *Was it when you first arrived that you realized Charlton was an all in one operation? It was certainly the only comics publisher that did everything*

Nick: Yeah, I didn't realize it until I arrived there, in all honesty. It was an eye-opener because I had worked at the Warren offices and there, they just did the editing. And then all the artwork was sent to Sparta, Illinois, where it was printed. But whereas at Charlton, we did everything right there in Derby. We even did the color separations there. A part of my job was to sort of coordinate with the color separating department. And the colors were all done by hand.

CBA: *And there was a bunch of women in the office who—*

Nick: Yes, they were—all the color separators, for some reason, were women.

CBA: *How did you look at the quality of the color separating?*

Nick: The women did a fine job but somewhere in-between, it just kind of got messed up. The color in Charlton comics was not the best in the world. But the women themselves did an excellent job. They were very meticulous in their work, and so forth. But somewhere along the line, it just didn't translate to the final product.

CBA: *Could that be annoying? Obviously, Charlton comics had very substandard printing, and the quality of the paper was very substandard.*

Nick: Oh, absolutely. Because, as I said, it was just purely to keep the presses going, and no other purpose.

CBA: *Was that frustrating?*

Nick: Yeah, it was a little bit frustrating, but we did the best we could under the circumstances. We eventually just adjusted ourselves to the quality of the comics. And we knew what the stories were going to look like when we finished with them and just shrugged our shoulders and said, "Well, we're going to give our best." Joe Gill was there as one of the staff writers. Joe could turn out stories at a phenomenal rate, really good stuff. I used to love Joe's stories. I would always sit down and read over his stories. He was, like, the staff writer at the time.

CBA: *Joe Gill is arguably the most prolific writer in comics history.*

Nick: [*laughter*] Oh, I wouldn't argue with that!

CBA: *Four bucks a page.*

Nick: Yeah. [*laughter*] Considering what he got paid, in order to keep a family going, he had to turn out a *lot* of pages.

CBA: *Yeah, he actually ended up with, according to Joe, you know—he made some good money because he was putting out so many pages.*

Nick: He told me this story that he was turning out comic stories at such a rate that he had to use pen names in order to not make it look as if everything in the world was written by Joe Gill. And so when he was being called in to the boss's office because he was getting paychecks under all these pen names. And he was called into John Santangelo's office and Joe knocked on the door, and Santangelo said, "Who is it?" And he said, "Joe Gill." And John Santangelo said, "Come on in, boys."

CBA: [*laughter*] *So, Joe knew he was in trouble when he went on the carpet.*

Nick: Right, right. And it's a shame, because Joe is such a good writer and such a prolific writer too. You got to hand it to that guy.

CBA: *What was John Santangelo, Sr. like?*

Nick: I only actually had direct contact with him a few times. Most of my contact was with John Santangelo, Jr., who took over the day-to-day running of the whole business from his dad. John Santangelo, Jr. was a bit of a playboy, and actually, he reminded me very much of Jim Warren. John was a nice guy, and a lot of fun and very down-to-earth.

CBA: *Was Charlie Santangelo already gone by that time?*

Nick: I'm not really sure how much Charlie actually had to do with the business. He was there, but I never quite knew, exactly, how involved he was.

CBA: *What was George Wildman like?*

Nick: George was an artist, as you know. He did *Popeye*. At the time, I worked for George. He and I didn't always get along, but I think that was more *my* fault than his. George was very businesslike and liked to have everything done properly. And I, unfortunately, was the brash young kid, if you know what I mean. I had worked for the great Wally Wood and Charlton, at the time, was a come-down, and I kind of acted that way. So, unfortunately, the rifts between George and I were, I would say 90% my fault. Because any person who has to put up with a brash young kid has to put up with a brash young ego. And that I had. Eventually, George and I came to a good understanding and we did work together very well towards the end.

CBA: *So he was very businesslike?*

Nick: Very businesslike.

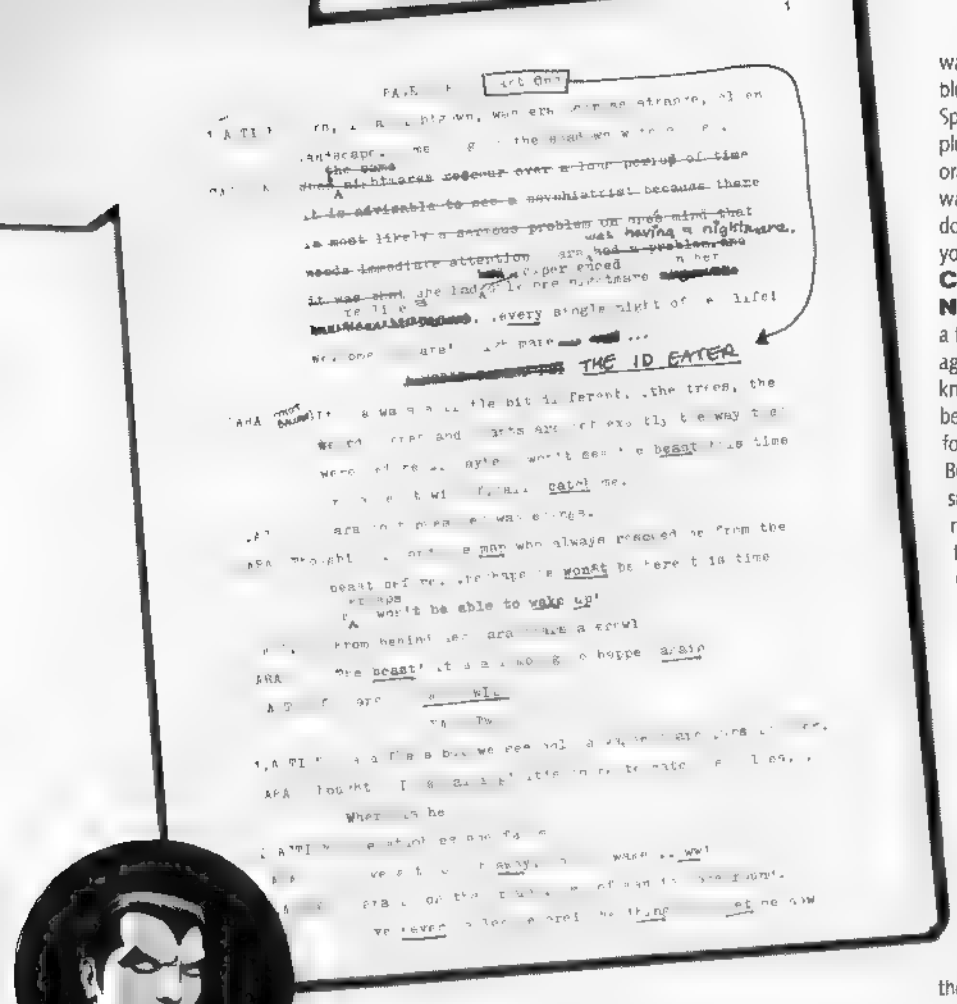
CBA: *And you came in, what year? 1970 or '71?*

Nick: About 1971, I think. Because I had been working for Woody at the time, as I said. And then I went over to Charlton and George was the one who actually got Charlton interested in super heroes again.

CBA: *So it was George, not you?*

Nick: No, it was George. He actually had gone to a meeting with John Santangelo Jr. He knew that I was very interested in super-heroes, and he knew that super-heroes were the Big Thing in comics. And he came back from the meeting and he said, "Nick, I talked them into doing super-heroes. So here's your chance. See what you can do." And so after my brain started spinning, I got to come up with the perfect super-hero (my favorite super hero as a kid wasn't Superman, but Plastic Man). I said, "I got to come up with something like Plastic Man." And so I combined my great love of Albert Einstein, one of my boyhood heroes, so I was very well aware of $E=MC^2$, his famous formula. And so I came up with E-Man, a creature of pure energy who could take the form of matter or energy at will. And my favorite artist at the time was a Charlton artist named Joe Staton. I had worked with Joe on a number of horror stories and Joe was one of the sweetest guys in the world. Very, very easy going and so when I came up with E-Man, I called him up about the

Above: *What almost was. Nick Cuti surprised the heck out of ye ed when the artist sent in presentation material for the hitherto unknown Mastermind, conceived as a Charlton super hero title in 1974. Don Newton's concept drawing and logo. Courtesy of Nick Cuti. Mastermind ©2001 Nicola Cuti and the estate of Don Newton.*



MASTERMIND
CY KEY

SARA
BELLUM

DR. BELLUM
INVESTIGATOR IN
PSYCHIC RESEARCH

CUTTI
NEURAL

possibility of him doing the series

CBA: *Did you have the whole concept fleshed out beforehand or was Joe a part of the whole process of creating a character?*

Nick: My basic concept was E-Man was a worker at an atomic energy plant. And there was an explosion at the plant and he was blown to smithereens, but because of the atomic energy he was able to control himself and come back as a human being. Joe *hated* that concept. And he said, "Nick, can't you come up with something better than that?" And so I was trying to come up with a better origin for E-Man and I was reading a book on astronomy at the time, because I told you I was a big reader of science. And I came up with the fact that stars novaed every so often. They erupt and give off huge amounts of energy and then calm down a bit. And I said "Wow. If one of these stars erupts, gave off this packet of intelligent energy, and this packet of intelligent energy eventually traveled to the Earth, and decided that here was a great place to live, and made Earth its home, that might work." I called up Joe and I gave him that origin. He loved it. And that was the origin of E-Man.

CBA: *He was an Innocent Abroad, so to speak.*

Nick: Exactly. He was very naive, didn't know anything about the Earth ways. That's how he got hooked up with this stripper by the name of Nova Kane. And she became his, more or less, guide into the world. She was his protector, and his guide, and showed him around the world because she was very world-wise.

CBA: *I distinctly recall E-Man was released as being a true bolt from the blue. It was a wonderfully refreshing strip in it had the qualities of Plastic Man, you know? Plus, Joe just really exploded and it was funny. It was very sweet natured material when other companies were putting out very dark stuff. Did it make an impact?*

Nick: By the way, the coloring of *E-Man* was mine. Joe sent a black-&-white drawing of E-Man. I told him, "No cape and I'd like the $E=MC^2$ on his chest, the formula." Those were the only requirements I told Joe and he was free to design the costume any other way he wanted to. And he sent in a black-&-white drawing of E-Man and I covered it with a transparent piece of paper and I colored it orange and white and yellow. And the reason I used those colors was because I had noticed that all the super-heroes were either red, blue, or a combination of red and blue. Superman was red and blue. Spider-Man was red and blue. And Batman was purple, which is red plus blue. I wanted to stay away from red and blue. So I decided on orange and yellow for E-Man, which is also the color of energy, anyway. So it worked out really well. The coloring of his costume is my doing even though the design of E-Man is entirely Joe's. What was your question again?

CBA: *About the impact for the readers.*

Nick: Well, it was kind of a strange impact. On the stands, he was a total disaster, which is understandable because he was going up against Spider-Man, Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman. You know, really great super-heroes, the kings of the industry. But he became Charlton's number one subscription, so we *did* have a fan following. It outsold all the other comics, as far as subscriptions go. But it wasn't enough. By #10, I got the word from John Santangelo, saying, "Nick, we know it's your comic and, you know, out of respect for you, we kept it going. But it's a disaster. We'd like you to drop it."

CBA: *Was it really? I'd heard E-Man was one of the lowest-sellers of the Charlton line and I was always shocked as it was one of the truly original books Charlton came out with.*

Nick: Well, it really was. They showed me the numbers, and it was definitely one of the lowest sellers Charlton had.

CBA: *What did you conceive of the reason behind that?*

Nick: As I said, I was going against some of the biggest super heroes around? So it just didn't stand a chance against the kings of the industry.

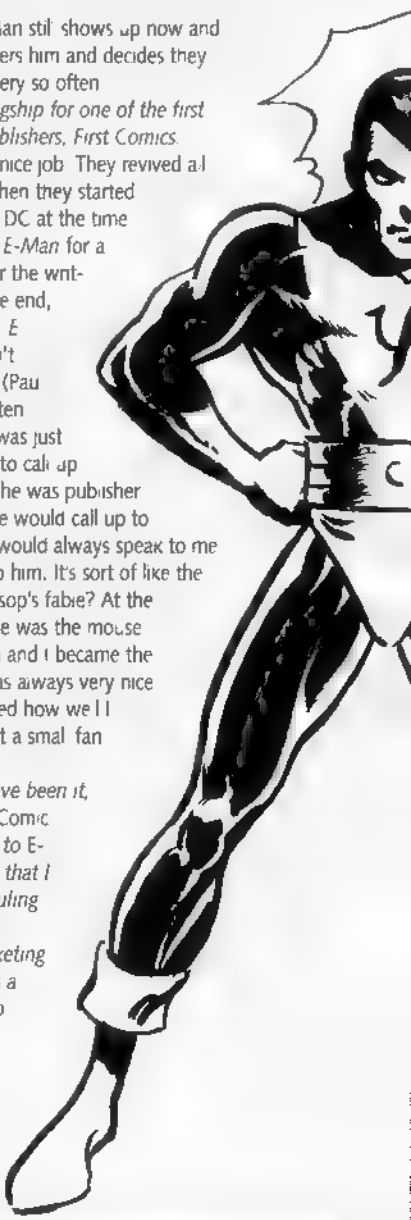
And ironically E-Man still shows up now and then. Somebody discovers him and decides they want to publish him every so often.

CBA: *He was the flagship for one of the first independent comics publishers, First Comics.*

Nick: They did a really nice job. They revived all the old Charlton issues and then they started new ones. I was working for DC at the time and so I wasn't able to write *E-Man* for a while. Marty Pasko took over the writing job. And then, toward the end, Paul Levitz said, "Look, Nick. *E-Man* is your comic. Why don't you go ahead and write it?" (Paul Levitz and I have always gotten along very well. When Paul was just a fan publisher, and he used to call up Charlton all the time. I think he was publisher of *The Comic Reader*. And he would call up to find out the latest dope. He would always speak to me and I was always very nice to him. It's sort of like the lion and the mouse story, Aesop's fable? At the time, we were the lion and he was the mouse. And later he became the lion and I became the mouse. [*laughter*] And he was always very nice to me because he remembered how well I treated him when he was just a small fan publisher.

CBA: *I think that might have been it, too. If I recall correctly,* The Comic Reader *gave a nice exposure to E-Man. That was also the time that I started attending the Phil Seuling cons, and finding a Charlton booth. And there was a marketing push by you guys. There was a redesign of the Charlton logo. You guys were making a presence.*

Nick: Oh, yeah. Did you want to know the story about the Charlton logo? The Charlton logo was pretty dull. It



was just a little box with a "C" in it. And George Wildman was the one who redesigned it. George had come up with a lot of great ideas for Charlton. We had visited a plant, a distributing plant, and he saw all these cardboard boxes. And some of them were magazines, some of them were comics. And he came up with the idea that if you printed the Charlton logo on the box itself, it would immediately tell everyone who was looking for comic books where the comics were. And they would tend to sort of gravitate towards Charlton comics because they knew where to grab some comics. And that was exclusively his idea. And then he redesigned the Charlton logo and he came up with a bullseye. And he showed it to me and he said "Nick, what do you think?" And I said, "Wow. That's really great. Can I make a suggestion?" And he said, "Go ahead." And I said, "If you put a little black arrow in the Charlton bullseye, it would cut the bullseye into a 'C C', which could stand for 'Charlton Comics.'" And he said, "Great idea." And he incorporated that little black triangle. So the Charlton Bullseye was George's idea and the black triangle was mine.

CBA: *[laughter] Working together.*

Nick: Working together. Right. George is, by far, an extremely talented man, there's no two ways about it. He came up with a lot of really innovative ideas at Charlton comics and I really credit him with reviving the whole Charlton line. Single-handedly, just about.

CBA: *Did you feel that by putting a number of artists to steady work, you were able to see a progression in their talent?*

Nick: Well, of course. The more an artist works, the better he gets. There's no argument about that. Joe Staton grew quite a bit. I remember his very early work at Charlton and his work now is light years ahead of those early days. And he's grown tremendously, more than any other artist I've seen. You just take one of his old stories and compare it to one of his present-day stories, there's no comparison.

CBA: *Well, I would argue that quite a bit of his Charlton work was whimsical and his style does call to mind perhaps not the genius, but certainly the whimsy of Jack Cole. He was one of the few artists in the early '70s who really did a lot of whimsy. And the other guy you worked with who did a lot of whimsy was Wally Wood. And as a cartoonist yourself, you went on flights of fantasy.*

Nick: Well, yeah, I still do some cartooning from time to time. I'm in animation, of course, so I do cartooning although my work in animation is mostly as a background designer.

CBA: *Do you perceive that in comics, there has not been enough whimsy?*

Nick: I agree with that. There are certain artists who are illustrators and their work is very realistic and there's an attempt at realism. But there's not enough that actually do the whimsical work. Joe Staton is definitely one of them. Tom Sutton, absolutely, and John Byrne is another one whose style is very fluid and whimsical.

CBA: *After Dick left, the Charlton line went through a real dip in quality. And then, with the advent of George and you, it rose again with some fine material.*

Nick: Well, I was riding George's coattails because, really, it was George.

CBA: *But you were doing an enormous amount of writing then.*

Nick: Yeah, yeah.

CBA: *It was your words that were in E-Man that made it such a whimsical, fun strip, along with Joe's artwork.*

Nick: Well, thank you, but George gave me a free hand with that. And I have to thank him for that.

CBA: *You and Joe Gill were atypical, in a sense, of the many writers in the industry at the time. More often than not, the DC and Marvel writers were focused on character and continuity. You and Joe did short, self contained stories.*

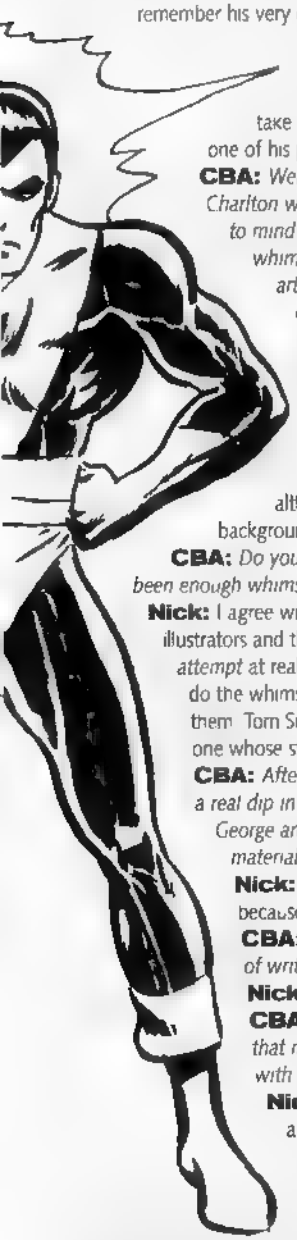
Nick: I've always considered myself not a writer but a storyteller. And so, a storyteller is more plot driven than character- or continuity-driven.

CBA: *"Here to there."*

Nick: Right, exactly. There's usually a short, little quip that has a surprise ending or at least a tie-up ending as opposed to a long continuous story where all the characters and the situations develop over a long period of time. So as I said, I've always considered myself to be a storyteller. Writers are a completely different animal and I've never really considered myself to be in that category.

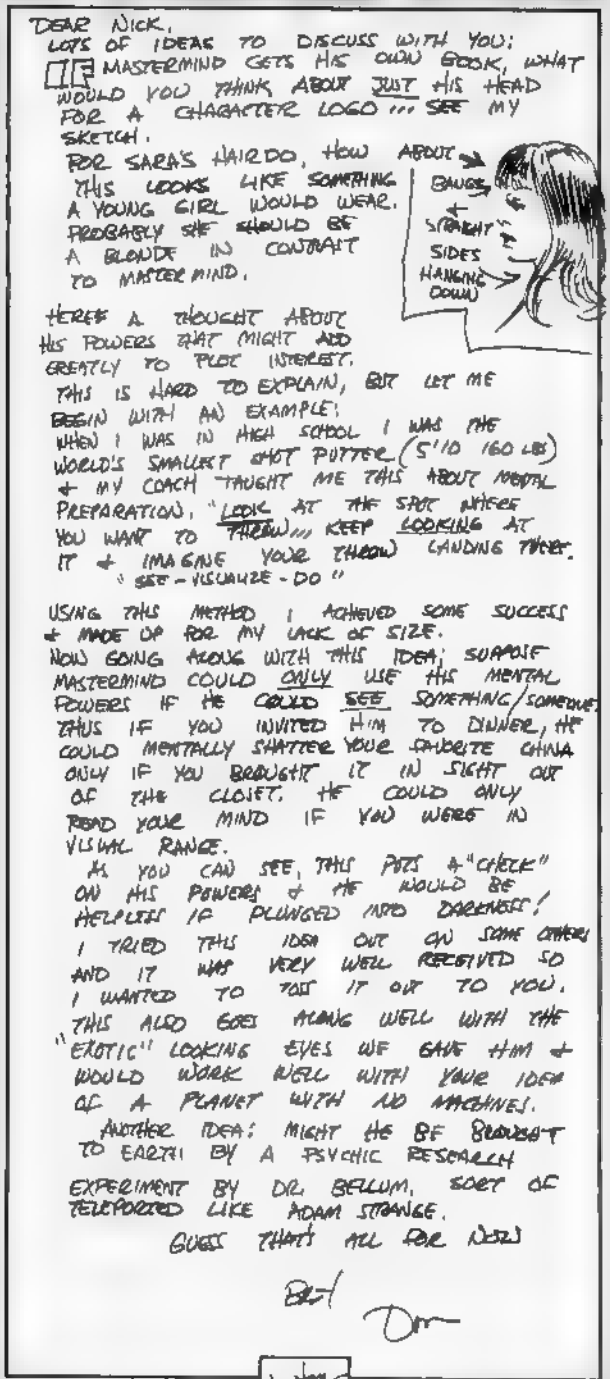
CBA: *So you never exploited your talents as a writer? Obviously you do to some degree, you work in animation today.*

Nick: Not as a writer, as an artist. I do write. I just wrote a novel, as a matter of fact, that should be coming out very soon called *Spin a Web of Death*, starring my main character, Captain Cosmos, and I'll be doing more. But if you ever read the novel, you'll see that it is a plot-driven—well, there are characters, of course. I tried to develop characters but only in terms of plot and I don't go into clever phrases and quips or long descriptions because that's kind of in the writer category. Ray Bradbury. Stephen King—those guys are writers. And they could write about almost anything and you just want to read about it. But a storyteller has to have a clever story, otherwise you're



Opposite page, top: *Page one of Nick Cuti's first—and only—Mastermind script. Initially the tale was a two parter of two chapters, eight pages each, with the titles, "A World Called Psi" and "The Id Eater," respectively. The script indicates the story was change to be entirely called "The Id Eater." The cover page states "Book Mastermind, artist: Don Newton, pages: 16." Penciled on the cover page is "not assigned" and the production number, D-6218.*
Opposite page, left: *Head shots of the Mastermind cast (dig those clever names!), rendered in full color by Don Newton, apparently for the ill fated presentation.*
Center inset: *Mastermind character vignette by Don Newton.* **Above:** *Don's full-color presentation montage for the unrealized Mastermind comic. All courtesy of Nick Cuti. Mastermind and related characters ©2001 Nicola Cuti and the estate of Don Newton.*

Left: *Don Newton's cover rough for the unrealized Mastermind #1. Don noted that the "head" logo (below the bulls-eye) needed an aura around it.* **Below:** *Newton was obviously jazzed about the concept, as noted in this (liberally reproduced) letter to Nick Cuti. Courtesy of Nick. Mastermind ©2001 Nick Cuti & the estate of Don Newton*


DEAR NICK,
LOTS OF IDEAS TO DISCUSS WITH YOU; IF MASTERMIND GETS HIS OWN BOOK, WHAT WOULD YOU THINK ABOUT JUST HIS HEAD FOR A CHARACTER LOGO ... SEE MY SKETCH.
FOR SARA'S HAIRDO, HOW ABOUT THIS LOOKS LIKE SOMETHING A YOUNG GIRL WOULD WEAR. PROBABLY SHE SHOULD BE A BLONDE IN CONTRAST TO MASTER MIND.
BANGS + STRAIGHT SIDES HANGING DOWN
HERE'S A THOUGHT ABOUT HIS POWERS THAT MIGHT ADD GREATLY TO PLOT INTEREST. THIS IS HARD TO EXPLAIN, BUT LET ME BEGIN WITH AN EXAMPLE: WHEN I WAS IN HIGH SCHOOL I WAS THE WORLD'S SMALLEST SHOT PUTTER (5'10 160 LBS) + MY COACH TAUGHT ME THIS ABOUT MENTAL PREPARATION. "LOOK AT THE SPOT WHERE YOU WANT TO THROW ... KEEP LOOKING AT IT + IMAGINE YOUR THROW LANDING THERE. " SEE - VISUALIZE - DO "
USING THIS METHOD I ACHIEVED SOME SUCCESS + MADE UP FOR MY LACK OF SIZE.
NOW GOING ALONG WITH THIS IDEA; SUPPOSE MASTERMIND COULD ONLY USE HIS MENTAL POWERS IF HE COULD SEE SOMETHING/SOMEONE. THUS IF YOU INVITED HIM TO DINNER, HE COULD MENTALLY SHATTER YOUR FAVORITE CHINA ONLY IF YOU BROUGHT IT IN SIGHT OUT OF THE CLOSET. HE COULD ONLY READ YOUR MIND IF YOU WERE IN VISUAL RANGE.
AS YOU CAN SEE, THIS PUTS A "CHECK" ON HIS POWERS & HE WOULD BE HELPLESS IF PLUNGED INTO DARKNESS!
I TRIED THIS IDEA OUT ON SOME OTHERS AND IT WAS VERY WELL RECEIVED SO I WANTED TO TOSS IT OUT TO YOU.
THIS ALSO GOES ALONG WELL WITH THE "EXOTIC" LOOKING EYES WE GAVE HIM + WOULD WORK WELL WITH YOUR IDEA OF A PLANET WITH NO MACHINES.
ANOTHER IDEA: MIGHT HE BE BROUGHT TO EARTH BY A PSYCHIC RESEARCH EXPERIMENT BY DR. BELLUM, SORT OF TELEPORTED LIKE ADAM STRANGE.
GUESS THAT'S ALL FOR NOW.
Best
Don
NEWTON

going to get bored with him very quick y

CBA: *You were able to exploit that medium with comics. Was there a trade-off at Charlton of having the freedom of doing what you wanted within the confines of a comic book page?*

Nick: Absolutely, because I had problems writing for Marvel and DC. I did do some stories for both of them and the reason I had d fficulty was the fact that they were so structured. If I was going to write a Superman or Spider-Man story, I would have to follow all of the history of this character and that character. I wasn't completely free to do whatever I wanted. Not that Marvel or DC was very confining. It's just they had these characters and you couldn't violate the storyline or the continuity. Whereas at Charlton, I loved working there because there just really weren't any restrictions, just categories. If I, the writer, felt like scripting a romance comic, I could script a romance comic, or I felt like writing a war comic or a horror story or whatever. I would just sit down and bang one out.

CBA: *Did you advocate doing a science-fiction anthology book at Charlton?*

Nick: I did, but at the time they weren't really looking for science-fiction. They had some success with s-f in the past and, in fact, I've collected some of Charlton's old s-f comics but for some reason at the time period that I was there, they didn't seem to want to do that genre. It just wasn't popular at that time.

CBA: *Charlton had its share of s-f anthology books, as weak as they could be, for a long period of time.*

Nick: They went on for quite a while with some of those s-f comics.

CBA: *Yeah, I think longer than DC's* Mystery In Space. *Sal Gentile attempted to revive the genre just before you arrived with* Space War, Outer Space, Space Adventures.

Nick: Right. When I left, they were working on *Flash Gordon* but I think that was mainly because King Features had given them the license. I remember Pat Boyette did a few and there were a few s-f series, but they were all based on TV shows like *The Six Million Dollar Man* and *Space: 1999*. I don't actual y consider those science-fiction comics as they're actually based on TV series.

CBA: *Personality vehicles.*

Nick: Right, exactly.

CBA: *You wrote a lot of that stuff, didn't you?*

Nick: I did write some *Space: 1999* and *Six Million Dollar Man*. Not a *lot* of it, but some. Joe Gill wrote a whole bunch for those two titles.

CBA: *You had a good relationship with fans, didn't you?*

Nick: Yeah, I always loved the fans ever since my first con, which was a Phil Seuling convention. To this day, I love fans.

CBA: *Surprisingly, when I was just a young punk going to the Phil Seuling cons what that you were very respectful and a very nice person to us kids.*

Nick: Why, thank you. That's nice to hear.

CBA: *You responded to probably insane questions and it was very positive and it was with your arrival Bob Layton's fanzine* Charlton Bul seye *followed up pretty quickly.*

Nick: They were a great bunch. Well, I still have to say that it was all George Wildman's doing. I really did ride the coattails. George was the most innovative person there.

CBA: *There's an axiom, almost, that goes with Charlton editorial in the '70s which is that* E-Man *was the worst-selling book on the stands, but it was the best-selling in subscriptions. The book, actually, really sat on the fence of the emerging direct market, in that was the determination right there, that the market was too small in mainstream terms, and too haphazard to get by usual distribution methods.*

Nick: Exactly. At the time, not many people were paying that close attention to fans. It was only towards the later years of the mid-to-late '70s that we suddenly realized that it was the fans that were actual y keeping comics alive, not the general public.

CBA: *Well, you recognized that pretty early.*

Nick: I did because I used to go to conventions. But a lot of the people then—

CBA: *Then in the house ads you had throughout the books, you were very, very cognizant of getting direct contact with the reader.*

Nick: Right. Bill had gone into partnership with Phil Seuling and so met Phil who started his conventions. I used to go to his conventions, and so I became very well educated about fans and their powers. But at the time, very few people considered the fans—they *recognized* the fans, they knew they were there, they knew they were a force, but they never considered them to be as potent an economic force as they became later on. For a while there, comics actually started gearing towards the fans.

CBA: *Right, but gearing towards the minority of extreme fans perhaps discarded the majority of casual readers.*

Nick: Exactly, exactly. I think that was a mistake, eventually causing the downfall of comics because for the longest time, the way comics survived was by appealing to the general public. Once they started narrow ng the focus to fans, well, that worked for a while but then the general public got disinterested and when the comics went back to the general public, there was nobody there. The general public wasn't buying comics any more.

CBA: *Their attention span was over. America moves on pretty quickly. Then it might become the rage again in no time. George Wildman recalled you came back from an ITC premiere showing of* Space 1999 *and you were very excited.*

Nick: Oh yeah, because those gave me an opportunity to write s-f. Space opera is my favorite form of s-f.

CBA: *You were a fan of* Star Trek?

Nick: Oh sure. As I said, I go way back to *Tom Corbett: Space Cadet, Space Patrol*, and *Captain Video!*

CBA: *[laughs] I think we noticed that, Captain Cosmos!*

Nick: [chuckles] Okay

CBA: *What was the idea behind doing black-&-white magazines?*

Nick: Basically to try and reach a more adult audience. At the time, the comic books were reaching college students. The biggest buyers of comics were not the kids any more, but college students. Kids, people who grew up with comics and were now in college. And they were buying *Spider-Man* and *Superman* and *Batman* and *Wonder Woman* and all those comics.

CBA: *You had access to marketing reports too?*

Nick: Oh yeah. Charlton had marketing groups that used to tell us all these things.

CBA: *Because Marvel and DC would hold their sales reports very close to their chest, and you had open access.*

Nick: But you have to realize that Charlton published *magazines* as well as comics. And so they had to have the marketing people out there.

CBA: *With the Space: 1999 b-&-w book, did Gray Morrow package the books himself or did he have other people come into his studio?*

Nick: The way it worked was we had gotten the license from Hanna-Barbera, of all people—they were the go-betweens with ITC, the British company, the ones who did *Space: 1999* and they didn't have an office in New York. We got the license through Hanna-Barbera, because we had been doing H-B comics, *The Flintstones, Pebbles & Bamm Bamm*. George and I were discussing who we'd like to get to be the artists on the comic. We had a comic book and a black-&-white magazine and George suggested, "How about Joe Staton? Joe would be perfect for the comic book." But for the magazine, we wanted someone who had more of an illustrator's style 'cause you know Joe has a very unique style which wasn't an illustrator's style. So I had suggested Gray Morrow.

CBA: *Joe's style is ideal for color.*

Nick: Right, exactly. Before Charlton, Gray had gotten me a job at Krantz Animation Studios. Ralph Bakshi was the director and Gray knew Ralph Bakshi. And we had met over at Bill Pearson's apartment and he got me that job. And I felt I owed him quite a bit and so when it came time to decide on who would do the black-&-white magazine of *Space: 1999*, I recommended Gray Morrow to do it. I was a great admirer of his artwork anyway, and it was no stretch for me because he had a real knack for nailing people's likenesses. So I owed Gray a big favor. His style was perfect, very illustrative. He's very good at capturing what characters look like. He got a perfect likeness of Martin Landau, Barry Morse and Barbara Bain. George was very happy with Gray. And then we went to Hanna-Barbera to find out if they would be satisfied with Gray. Turned out that this gal whose name escapes me, was a close friend of Gray's and when she found out that we had suggested Gray, she was thrilled. So here we were worried about Hanna-Barbera and it turned out that they were the ones who would have suggested Gray if we hadn't.

CBA: *[laughs] Gray started his own little industry there for a little while, didn't he?*

Nick: I have no idea how he worked it because I used to go over to everyone's studio all the time. I was always the kid who was hanging around the studios. Unfortunately, I was living in Connecticut and Gray was in New York or New Jersey, I don't remember which, so it was distant. I left Gray to do it all on his own, and whatever he couldn't handle himself, if there was too much work, he would hand it to some other artist who was also very, very good. None of the other artists who worked on *Space: 1999* were bad at all. They were all extremely talented and the work came out really beautiful.

CBA: *Jack Sparling worked on it for a while, right?*

Nick: Jack Sparling did. He and Gray, I think, were friends.

CBA: *Did you job out Emergency! and Six Million Dollar Man to Continuity? What was the deal there?*

Nick: Well, what happened was, strangely, Continuity came to us. Neal Adams and Dick Giordano saw that we were doing these magazines and Neal Adams, I think, was intrigued about the possibility of working for a company that he had almost a complete free rein with. Because, you know, I suppose that DC probably put a lot of restrictions on him. I got the impression that Neal kind of liked the idea of working for Charlton because it was a black-&-white, so his stuff wouldn't be colored. And I think he liked that idea. And, also, we used painted covers and that gave him an opportunity to do paintings.

the new crime files of michael MAUSER PRIVATE EYE
SNOW ANGELS
NICOLA CUTI writer/co-creator/artist
JOE STATON writer/co-creator/artist
WILLIE SCHUBERT letterer
SHELLEY ROBBINS editor
MY NAME IS MAUSER. THAT'S ALSO THE NAME OF MY PISTOL. IN MY PROFESSION I'M THE ONLY RELIABLE FRIEND THAT I HAVE. I TAKE CARE OF IT AND IT TAKES CARE OF ME. I'M A PRIVATE EYE. AND THIS IS MY STORY.
CAPRICORN
TEEN BEAT
LIVE FIVE

Above: *Nick Cuti and Joe Staton both confessed that they'd be satisfied producing just Mike Mauser stories 'til the end of their days if that's all the work they could do. Is any publisher listening? Here's Joe's evocative splash to an '80s Mauser tale, from the one-shot The New Crime Files of Mike Mauser. Reproduced from the original art. Courtesy of Nick Cuti. ©2001 Nicola Cuti and Joe Staton.*

Nick: Yeah. And there were a lot of young artists who were working at the studio and very often they would get the opportunity to do illustrations for the different books, along with Neal. And they did great jobs, by the way. I don't ever recall being dissatisfied with anything that came out of Continuity, even when they handed it to a young artist who was still, you know, feeling his oats, just trying out, they handed it to some really talented young artists. So everything that came out of Continuity was quality stuff.

CBA: *Those magazines were pretty shortlived?*

Nick: Yeah, unfortunately. I don't think they held up and they eventually died for one reason or another. I don't know why.

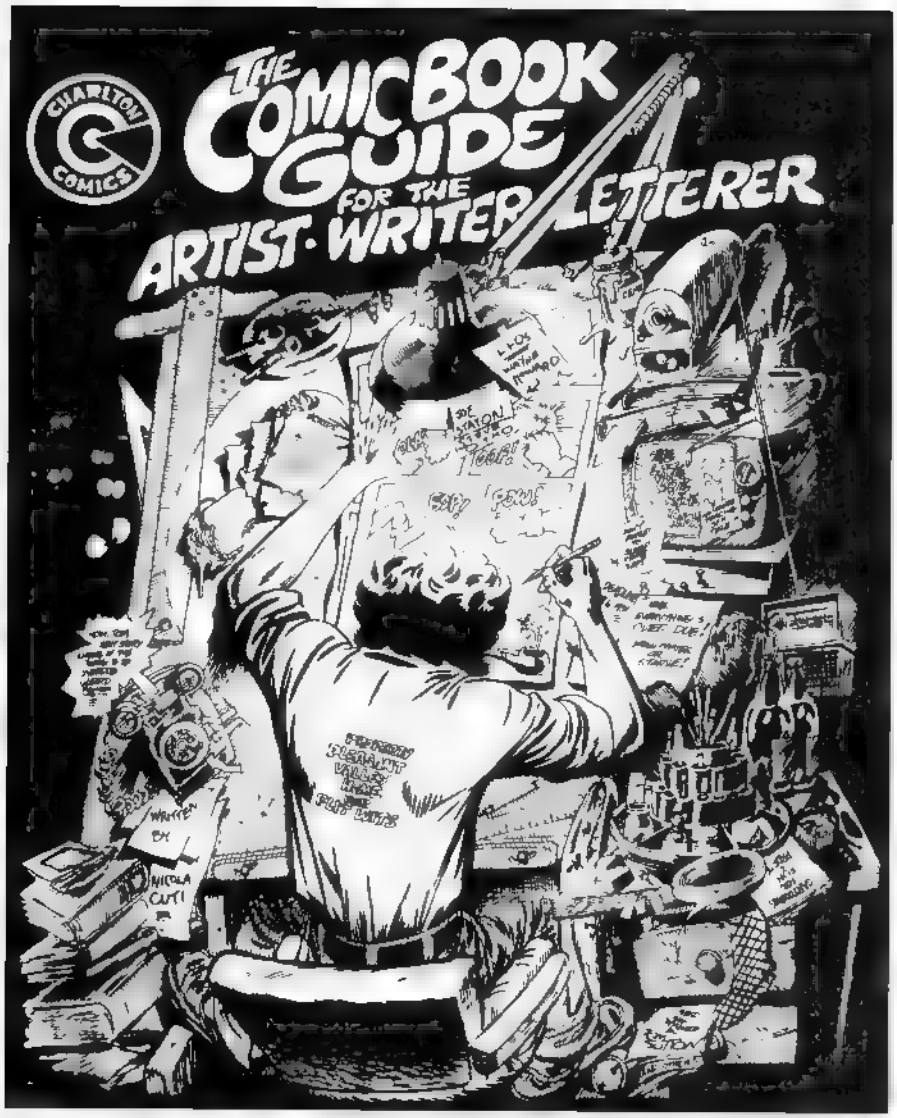
CBA: *How do you recall first coming across John Byrne's work?*

Nick: John Byrne was part of the Bob Layton group. They had all formed this little fan club called the CPL/Gang.

CBA: Contemporary Pictorial Literature?

Nick: That's it. And they had contacted us because they wanted to do a fanzine based on Charlton characters. And we loved that idea at the time. So we contacted them and we said, "Yeah, sure. If you want to do a magazine based on Charlton, sure."

CBA: *Marvel was doing FOOM and DC was doing Amazing World of DC Comics at the time. Was it, "Hey, you know, now is*



Above: *Its use as a subscription "gimme" was an afterthought, Nick Cuti wrote in a letter about* The Comic Book Guide. *"I wrote the booklet because we were getting portfolios from people at a rate of about two a day. Most of them were awful but occasionally we'd get portfolios from very talented people who just didn't know the mechanics of comic book art. So we decided to do the booklet as a quick way to help those artists. Later, we thought they might be used as a gimmick to boost our subscriptions." Here we feature Tom Sutton's line art from the cover. Having spent hours chatting with Tom about everything under the sun, ye ed has little doubt Tom's drawing table really does look like that! ©2001 the respective copyright holder*

the time for a Charlton fanzine, too"?

Nick: No, not really. I never paid that much attention, to be honest with you. I was concentrating fully on Charlton and I think we all were, so it wasn't in competition with DC or Marvel. We considered ourselves to be the bottom feeders. Let DC and Marvel get the stuff on the surface. We'll take whatever's left over. And be very happy with it. So, when we had a group that was interested in putting out a fanzine, we thought this was wonderful. And then Bob Layton, Roger Stern, and John Byrne came down to our offices and we found out they were very talented artists and writers. Roger is a writer. John Byrne, as you probably know, is an artist. So is Bob Layton. We started handing them scripts to do. And Joe Gill, especially, loved John Byrne's work and he came up with the concept of *Doomsday+1*, he asked to have John Byrne be the illustrator for it. And they had this little character called Rog-2000 and we used him as a back-up in *E-Man*. We were going to run trials of other super-heroes, and Steve Ditko had a super-hero called Killjoy which only ran, I think, one issue.

And then Bob Layton and John Byrne and Roger Stern came over to us and said, "Well, how about doing a super-hero feature with Rog-2000?" And I thought, "Hey, that's great. It's a terrific little character. Sure, why not?" And so I wrote a couple of scripts and John illustrated it and it ran in the back of *E-Man* for, I don't know, how many issues, maybe four or so.

CBA: *Right. And Mauser was in the back of* Vengeance Squad.

Nick: Yeah. I love science-fiction, fantasy, horror, and all. S-f is my favorite genre. But I always had a love for the private eye genre. The heart, the film noir. And so when Joe Gill came up with *Vengeance Squad*, I had asked to do a little feature in the back and they let me do it, and that was "Mike Mauser, Private Eye," which I got Joe Staton to illustrate. And to this day, the Mike Mauser stories have always been my favorite stories of all the stories I've written. I don't think I've done anything better than Mike Mauser.

CBA: *Was Mauser developed first in* E-Man?

Nick: Yeah, I tried him out in *E-Man* first.

CBA: *Always with an eye of doing solo stories with him?*

Nick: Well, not at first. At first, he was a sort of secondary character that I used in *E-Man*. And then, when Joe came up with *Vengeance Squad*, I thought about transferring him over to that title, because I felt he deserved it. As I said, the private eye genre has always had a great. I always loved it ever since I was a kid. I used to watch *Richard Diamond, Private Eye* and *Mike Hammer*. I still watch all those shows. I love them.

CBA: *You said your responsibilities at Charlton was doing corrections and production work. When did you find time to write? When you were there on staff? At home?*

Nick: I wrote at home. What happened was this. I would just write at home. Joe was the one who was the staff writer, and he would write right there.

CBA: *And his typewriter is—?*

Nick: Oh, his typewriter was going like blue blazes! These were before the days of word processing! He was just turning these things out at an incredible rate, and they were great stories, as I said. Joe was the staff writer; I would write at home. Eventually, I got to a point where we had gotten these magazines, you know, *Six Million Dollar Man, Space: 1999*, and *Emergency!* and all that. And I asked my boss, I said, "George, where do you need me more as an assistant editor or a writer?" And he said, "To tell you the truth Nick, I need you as a writer because Joe is our only writer and I need someone else because we've got so much work now." So I dropped out as assistant editor. Paul Delpo took over my position there, and he was my assistant. And then he took over as George's assistant. And later I had recommended Bill Pearson after Paul left Charlton.

CBA: *So when you had your writing gig, were you on staff?*

Nick: I was on staff as a writer, but I did all my writing at home. I wrote about a story a day.

CBA: *So you stopped going in to Derby?*

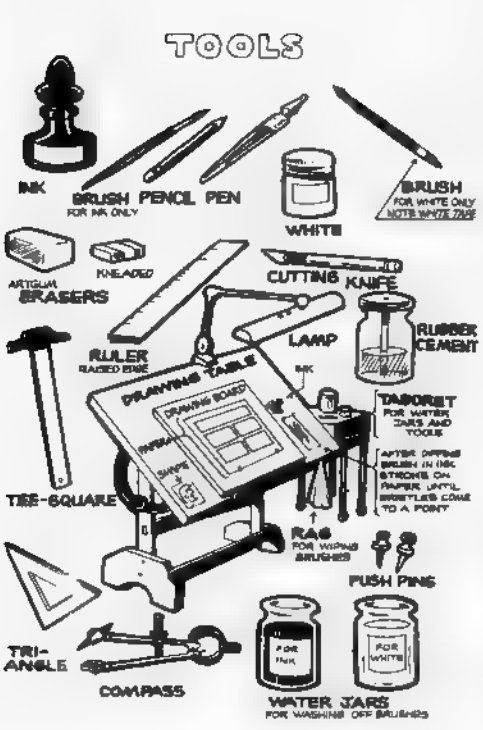
Nick: Yeah. I would write at home. I would spend, like, one day of the week, do all my research, just trying to come up with story ideas and I'd rough them all out. And then for the rest of the week, I would just write just one story a day. So I wrote somewhere's about 365 stories a year, roughly. But because mainly Charlton's rates weren't the greatest, so you had to do that many just to stay alive. They were paying me, I think, $7 a page at the time. Joe was getting about that much too, so I couldn't complain.

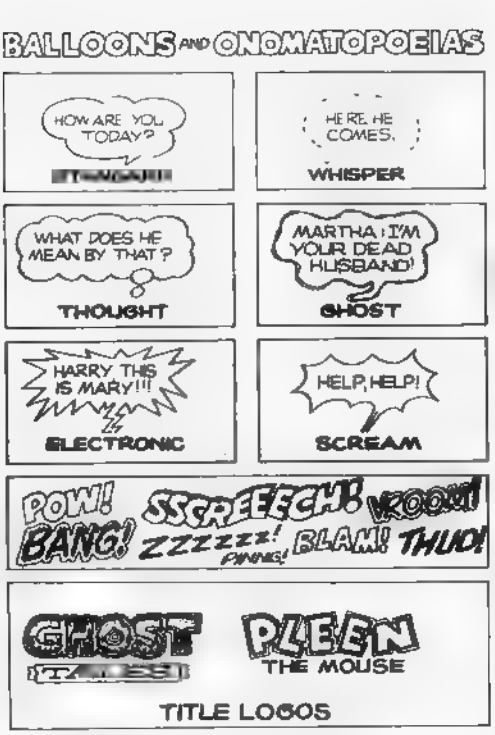
CBA: *How did you conduct research?*

Nick: My research consisted of going through books and magazines, hoping that they'd inspire a story. Sometimes a magazine article or newspaper or novel would suddenly inspire a story. I would say, "Okay, so Ahab was going after a whale. I suppose he wasn't going after a whale. I suppose he was a space pilot, and was going after some monstrous creature that was living in outer space?" And boom! I'd have a story. *The Count of Monte Cristo*, where he broke out of prison and got revenge on the people who put him there, and suppose we set that in modern times, and so forth and so on. That's the way I'd come up with story ideas, take a classic story and put a new twist on it, or read a magazine article, and that would inspire a story, and so forth and I'd jot down all these ideas, and then for the rest of the time, write a story based on them. That was basically how I worked for about two years at Charlton, until they decided I was making too much money—some of the powers-that-be whose names I won't mention—decided I was making too much money, and terminated my stay there. That's when I called up Jim Warren and asked him for a job, because I said I'd had a falling out and I asked him for a job, and he said, "Sure, Nick, come on in," and I became Weezie Jones' assistant.

CBA: *Obviously, you must have spent more time on, say, the* E-Man *stories, than you did upon any given romance story.*

Nick: Well, yes and no. I always found *E-Man* stories flowed kind of naturally. Once I created the characters, they wrote their own stories. The banter between E-Man and his girlfriend, Nova Kane, just seemed so natural. When I was young, I used to be a fan of the Nick Charles *The Thin Man* series with Peter Lawford and Phyllis





SPACEMEN START BACK TO SHIP. MONSTER BEHIND ROCK.
DEAD WORLD
BLAKE
MARS IS A DEAD WORLD!
MARS IS A DEAD WORLD!
MARS IS A DEAD WORLD!
MARS IS A DEAD WORLD!

Kirk I remember how they used to wisecrack to each other There was also another series called *Mr. & Mrs. North* with Richard Denning and Barbara Britton with the same type of thing, husband and wife that were always wisecracking back and forth

CBA: *And, of course, William Powell and Myrna Loy with* Asta

Nick: I always loved that, that even in the darkest danger, in the most serious of murders, these people would be wisecracking and so I used that system for *E-Man*. And so E Man and Nova and all the other characters were always making wisecracks at the situation, even though they were pretty serious situations. I remember I'd seen a lot of super-hero comics that were just silly. I mean, they were trying to be a spoof of super-heroes and they set up very silly situations. I didn't want to do that. I wanted to set up serious situations and let them make light of it.

CBA: *So that there was actual threat of peril and that they would, somehow, come out of it. Was E-Man a favorite for you?*

Nick: Oh, absolutely. *E-Man*, and then Mike Mauser, were my absolute favorites to write.

CBA: *In comics, period?*

Nick: I would say so. I'd never pass an opportunity. Whenever someone wants to publish an E-Man or Mike Mauser story, I will always be there to work on it. *[laughs]*

CBA: *Thank you very much for that wonderful two-pager.*

Nick: I'm glad you enjoyed it because it's been a while. I'll tell you something: A two-pager is much more difficult to write than an eight or a ten-pager, because you've got to try to squeeze a story in two pages and that's *not* an easy thing to do. Give me 20 pages and I can come up with a great story but give me two and I'll be sweating bullets.

CBA: *You occasionally actually did that in* Haunted Love.

Nick: We had to because of the fact that the way it would work was we would assign stories and some of them were eight pages, some ten, some 15. And they would go out to the artists, we'd get the stories back and then we'd stack them up on the shelves. When we had to put together a magazine, *The Many Ghosts of Doctor Graves*, for instance, we'd get three stories and we'd find ourselves a page or two pages short so I'd have to quickly knock out a two-page story to fill up the space. And so that was the reason for a lot of those single- and two-page stories.

CBA: *Just developing mood really quick and moving in and out just because you can't tell much of a narrative?*

Nick: That's the whole problem. You can't, there isn't any room.

CBA: *Can you tell me physically what Charlton was like?*

Nick: At first, we had a booth almost, they didn't have those cubicles the way they do nowadays in offices, so we just had kind of a section of the plant. Below us was the plant, that's where all the cameras were, where all the presses were, and we were on the main floor, and the main floor we shared with magazines and marketing. Marketing, magazines and comics, we were in one corner. Later, we were moved to another building, which was a bowling alley, and we were in the rear of the bowling alley. . . which actually was not bad, because we had a huge office space that was all ours, entirely comics, and we used to have these big metal shelves where all the original art was stacked, and the color separators were there, and the editing department was there. So, whenever I had to go over to deliver the artwork, I had to walk across the bowling alley, and then out the front door and to the plant office. So that's what it was like physically.

CBA: *But couldn't you literally hear the noise of the bowling alley while you were working?*

Nick: No, it was in the back of the bowling alley, so we didn't hear the pins being crashed unless we opened the door. Then, we'd walk through the bowling alley.

CBA: *After work, was there a bar at the bowling alley?*

Nick: No, not that I recall. We socialized by going . . . there were a lot of restaurants in the area, so we used to go to the restaurants.

CBA: *Can you recall memorable freelancers who came by? Was Wayne Howard, for instance, there?*

Nick: Yeah. Wayne and I were good friends. Wayne was always there at the Charlton offices, and later we became friends, and used to go to each others' apartments all the time.

CBA: *What was Wayne like?*

Nick: The one thing I remember about Wayne, he had the most hideous laugh I'd ever heard, it was like the bray of a donkey. *[laughter]* It was very loud, and I remember when we used to go to conventions, and someone was on the stage who'd say something humorous, and Wayne would just burst into this laugh and everybody there would turn toward us. He always wore the same outfit, a white shirt, a kind of a tan bush jacket, black hat, black pants and black tie, and I used to wonder about that until one day, I was over at his apartment, and he opened up his closet, and there were 20 white shirts, 20 bush jackets, 20 black pants, and so I realized it wasn't the same outfit he wore every single day, it was just the same kind of outfit.

CBA: *Just like Little Orphan Annie on* Chuck McCann. *[laughs]*

Above: *Some of the pages from* The Comic Book Guide *given away by Charlton Publications. Two pages on left by staff letterer Frank Bravo. Above breakdown to-finished panel page by Wayne "Midnight Tales" Howard. ©2001 the respective copyright holder.*

Below: *Perhaps ye ed is a Harlequin Romance fan in the making, but he (and esteemed colleague, CBA associate editor David A. Roach) are big fans of Charlton's foray into Gothic romance comics, Haunted Love. This is Joe Staton's nifty cover icon for the title. ©2001 the respective copyright holder.*

Nick: R ght. He was very thin, and a heavy smoker. That almost caused a rift between us, because I'm a non-smoker and I'd reek of second-hand smoke, and one day, I told him it was really disturbing and he said he'd never come over to my apartment again. and I thought, "Well, I'm either going to have to accept the smoking or lose my friendship with Wayne," and I decided I'd accept the smoking, because my friendship with Wayne was very important to me. We even did a comic together called *Midnight Tales*, which Wayne was the one who came up with the idea, but he was looking for a writer, and when he met me, he decided I was the perfect writer to write this thing.

CBA: *What was the premise?*

Nick: The premise was there was a Professor Coffin, and his niece, Arachne—a take-off on arachnid, which is another name for spiders—would be the hosts of the magazine, and there'd be three stories in the magazine with a coupling story involving Professor Coffin and Arachne. I came up with the idea that the cover, which had noth ng to do with the stories or the theme, would be a gag all by itself, because when I was a kid, I used to pick up these horror magazines that would have these covers, and they'd have nothing to do with any of the stories inside the magazine, they'd just have some horrible situation, and so that's what I did, come up with the idea for the cover, and then we would discuss what the theme of each maga zine would be. One time it was blob monsters, and I wrote three stories about blob monsters, and another time, it was vampires, and I'd write three stories about vampires, and that sort of thing. And there'd be a coupling story with Professor Coffin and Arachne. Work ng with Wayne was a lot of fun. He was a good friend, so we enjoyed working together.

CBA: *Do you ever think about spearheading an anthology book yourself?*

Nick: I'd love to but it s a matter of money. The only sort of comic book that I ever thought about doing was Wayne's *Midnight Tales*. It was his whole concept. I threw in a few suggestions in structuring, but basically it was his idea to do a whole anthology series. But I would love to do an anthology book, a sci-fi anthology, like a digest-sized thing with text and i llustrations.

CBA: *Was that* Midnight Tales *a special arrangement between Charlton and Wayne? There was a "Created by Wayne Howard" blurb on the cover of every issue.*

Nick: Well, it was his idea, his concept, his everything.

CBA: *I believe that was unprecedented in Charlton comics.*

Nick: Probably, but as I said, the publishers paid very little attention to the comics so we were kind of free to do whatever we wanted as long as it was okay with George Wildman and he had no problems with it. *Voilá.*

CBA: *What was the thinking behind doing the painted covers? I remember some stunning Tom Sutton covers.*

Nick: Yeah, they were try ng to give the books a different look. As I said, they were trying to appeal to a different audience. They felt the comic books were for kids, and the magazines would be towards the college students, so they wanted to make them look different from the comics, so that was the reason for the painted covers on the magazines. Later, we did some painted covers for the comic books, as well. We did a few. Not that many, in comparison to how many comic book covers we did. It was just a spillover from the magazines, that was all.

CBA: *Tom Sutton did some really outstanding work for Charlton.*

Nick: Oh, yeah. Tom was one of our best, and he had almost free reign, whatever he wanted to do. If he wanted to write a story him-self, they said, "Sure, go ahead, Tom." If he wanted to do a painted cover, fine, no problem. Because his stuff always sold, with one exception, so just whatever he wanted to do, that was fine with us.

CBA: *Okay, what was the exception?*

Nick: I knew you were going to ask that!

CBA: *[laughs] Well...!*

Nick: Okay, for one issue of *Ghostly Tales*, he decided to try some-thing different, and he did this very adorable little illustration of a sweet little house with flowers around it, and a little ghost girl looking down on th s house. Well, it was one of the worst sellers we'd ever put out! Nobody associated this sweet little cover with *Ghostly Tales*, and so that was the only negative thing that Tom ever did, every-thing else he ever did was just huge, huge sellers. His stuff sold like crazy.

CBA: *Tell me about working with Tom.*

Nick: Tom Sutton is such a talented artist, always doing a beautif..l job. I used to ask for him when I would write stories.

CBA: *You wrote specifically with him in mind?*

Nick: Very often. But if not, I would at least ask for him when it came time to turn in the story. There were certain artists that were favorites that I would always ask for. Tom was definitely one of the first ones I would ask for.

CBA: *How would you characterize a typical Tom Sutton story? Would you look for organic things?*

Nick: Yeah, "organic" would be a good way of putting it. Also, he was very good with kid stories where he would have little boys out on some sort of mischief and they would encounter some sort of v llain or something like that. And so if I had a story that was in that genre then I would ask for Tom Sutton. Also, he was very, very good with science-fiction. Next to Woody, I think he was about the best there was.

CBA: *And you were quite enamored with that genre.*

Nick: Oh, absolutely.

CBA: *. so that's high praise indeed for Tom Sutton's abilities. Wherever you went and were able to make creative decisions, you sought out Tom Sutton a lot?*

Nick: Yes, Tom a lot. Joe Staton too, of course. I mean, I had my favorites that I would ask for. I know I didn't always have the option but very often they had to assign stories according to who was available. But when I was able to make a creative decision, I had my

Below: *It's the folks from Joe Gill & John Byrne's cool science-fiction title,* Doomsday +1 *as envisioned by none other than Neal Adams! The CPL/Gang marketed this image as a full-color poster. Courtesy of Bob Layton & CPL/Gang. ©2001 the respective copyright holder.*

favorites that I would always ask for

CBA: *You said one of your favorite strips that you did at Charlton was "Mike Mauser."*

Nick: Oh yeah, absolutely

CBA: *Which in some ways is a quintessential Tom Sutton strip, if you were to look for another illustrator*

Nick: If Joe was unavailable to do "Mike Mauser," I definitely would go with Tom because he did a strip that was similar, only about one story. I forgot the name of it but he had a private eye character that turned into a mouse. I remember him showing it to me one time and us having a good laugh over the similarities between that and Mike Mauser.

CBA: *And the baroque stylings of Sutton also bring forth darker stories. More H.P. Lovecraft inspired tales of the macabre.*

Nick: Right. I was a big reader of Lovecraft and I know Tom was, also. In fact, one of the stories that Joe Staton and I did together—several stories, in fact—Lovecraft either appeared as a major character or in the background because Joe, myself, and Tom were all enamored with HPL.

CBA: *Did you share that information with the freelancers, when sales would be up on particular things, and sales would be down?*

Nick: Not especially. I figured each freelancer kind of had the right to do what he wanted. As I said, the comics were there to keep the presses going. Charlton wasn't all that concerned with the sales. We were, the comics department was, we used to keep an eye to see which comics sold better, and which sold worse, but the powers that be could care less, in general.

CBA: *I meant with the other freelancers. Did you tell Tom, for instance, that "This particular werewolf story sold quite well, let's do another one?"*

Nick: Oh, yeah. We told the freelancers themselves—I'm sorry, I misunderstood you—we told the freelancers the sales when a particular issue of their's sold particularly well. Sure, because we felt that would encourage them.

CBA: *That was really not standard procedure, at least at DC. Actually, it was quite the opposite with them, they would hold the figures very closely, because they were always afraid the freelancers would demand more money or something, whatever their reasoning was.*

Nick: At Charlton, they could demand all the money they wanted, but the rates would stay the same!

CBA: *[laughs] Was the rate the same for everybody?*

Nick: Pretty much. There were some exceptions, some people got a little more, some people got a little bit less, but in general, they were pretty much standard. Therefore, it didn't matter if we told a freelancer that a particular comic of theirs was doing very, very well, they wouldn't demand any more money, because they knew they weren't going to get it. It's as simple as that, they did it for the love of the field, and Tom's... Tom and I have remained friends. Also every so often he calls me up or I'll call him up. Usually, he calls me up.

CBA: *He's a character, isn't he?*

Nick: Oh, yes, Tom is a wonderful character. *[laughter]* We used to go drinking together when we were younger, and boy, could he put it away! *[laughter]* I had a job trying to keep up with him. We used to go girl-chasing and drinking when we were younger.

CBA: *I called him up a couple of months ago, just generally to introduce myself and talk to him, and it must've gone on for two hours! [laughs]*

Nick: Oh, Tom is like that. Whenever he calls, I know I'm not going to be doing anything for the next two hours except talking with him. And if I call him, I always make sure I clear that time, that I don't have any freelance jobs or anything to work on, because Tom loves to talk. He's such an interesting talker, though, I love talking with him. I just have got to make sure I don't have anything to do for the next two hours.

CBA: *Unfortunately, he's got little regard for his work. At least, some of the work I've discussed.*

Nick: He's such a talent. Do you know anyone who draws like Tom Sutton? I sure don't. There's nobody in the field that draws like him.

CBA: *Do you remember Sanho Kim?*

Nick: Yes, I do. He's a Korean gentleman, obviously, you can tell that by his name. If I remember, he spoke English with a strong Korean accent. Very dedicated to his work, very serious. I remember at the time he was trying to sell us a Western, and so he treated George and I to a meal at a Korean restaurant at which he did all the ordering, and I was not familiar with Korean food, and I was eating stuff that I don't even want to think about what I ate, because I was letting him do all the ordering. He didn't convince us to take the Western, because it just seemed very odd for a person who was so deep into the Korean culture and so forth to do a Western. We wound up not taking his idea. A very good artist, and very strong worker, always very reliable. Whenever we gave him work, we would get the work back and it would be very well-done and right on time. He met all his deadlines.

CBA: *Do you remember working with South American artists?*

Nick: I did a lot of work with South American artists over at Warren, not so much at Charlton that I can recall. There was some, of course.

CBA: *Any Filipino artists you worked with?*

Nick: Yeah, again also at Warren, not so much at Charlton. Even Spanish artists, there were a lot of Spanish artists, Selection Illustradas did a lot of work for Warren, and I don't recall them doing a whole lot at Charlton, to be honest with you. They did do some, I remember some stories by Esteban Moroto, but not a whole heck of a lot. Warren Sattler did a lot of work for Charlton.

CBA: *Do you remember Warren Sattler?*

Nick: Yeah, very nice guy. My wife was a great fan of country Western music, so we went into the bar (that was right below our house at the time) and the announcer said, "And now introducing Warren Sattler and his band!" And I'm saying, "Warren Sattler?!? That's one of our artists!" So I went over to him, but unfortunately,

Above: *Nice likenesses of Barry Morse, Barbara Bain, and Martin Landau (a frustrated cartoonist himself!) by Gray Morrow for the Charlton b-&-w magazine, Space 1999, adapting the shortlived ITC science-fiction syndicated TV show. Perhaps the closest Nick ever got to writing pure space opera while working at Charlton, the series was a hybrid of Star Trek and Thunderbirds but curiously lacking in charm. Gerry Anderson's special effects were superb though.* ©2001 ITC Entertainment

Above: *The writing staff of Charlton comics. Nick Cuti (left) and Joe Gill hanging out afterhours at the bowling alley bar adjacent to the comic book department. Ye ed recently had the pleasure of sharing a discussion panel or two with Mighty Joe Gill at a 2000 Big Apple Con where we discussed Charlton's war comics and his vast contributions to the Derby Connecticut publishing house in general. You go, Joe! Photo courtesy of Nick Cuti*

Below: *Oops! We almost forgot to include one of Cuti's greatest finds, Mike Zeck, in this interview! Here's a Zeck drawn illo for a Cuti written text piece in one of Charlton's myriad mystery titles. Courtesy of Nick Cuti. ©2001 the respective copyright holder*

he'd had a few, and neither of us got into a conversation. Later, when he came into work, I neglected to mention that I'd seen his band.

CBA: *Was it a pleasant experience?*

Nick: Oh, yeah. Warren was a really nice guy, and it just was a non-experience rather than an unpleasant or a pleasant one. Like I said, the music was so loud, and he didn't recognize me, and I barely recognized him only because I knew his name. Smoky bar, everybody drinking, you know what I mean.

CBA: *Were you happy where you were at Charlton, or did you long to go to the New York...?*

Nick: I was very happy at Charlton. I would probably still be at Charlton, as I said, if it wasn't for the fact that I was let go. As I said, I'd gone from assistant editor to staff writer, and I was making much more money as a staff writer than as an assistant editor, and the powers that be decided I was making too much money and decided to terminate my stay there. But I was very, very happy there, I loved working there, I'd worked with some really wonderful people. George, as I said, is a great talent and very innovative. Joe and I, we used to go out drinking together from time to time. You said you had a photograph of Joe and I at this one bar that we were at.

CBA: *Yeah, yeah, it's a great smiling picture.*

Nick: Oh, yeah, I remember when that photo was taken.

CBA: *You and your afro.*

Nick: Was I wearing an afro at the time? I guess I was. *[laughter]*

CBA: *Pretty high.*

Nick: Well, I have this hair... *[laughter]* Well, I keep it short now for that very reason, so it won't embarrass me any more.

CBA: *Yang was successful enough to have a spin-off?*

Nick: Oh, yeah. *The House of Yang*. Actually, *Yang* and *E-Man* were fairly successful for Charlton. As I said, they did very poorly on the stands, but they did very well in subscriptions, so they did have a fan following on *Yang* and *E-Man*.

CBA: *Did you know Don Newton?*

Nick: Well, I gave Don his first professional work. What had happened was, we used to get two portfolios a day from people wanting to get into comics, and most of them were just god-awful. One day, we get a portfolio from Don Newton, and a short time later, from Michael Zeck, and they just blew me away. Both those guys were so talented, you could see it. So I contacted Don and told him we'd like to use him. I showed his stuff to George, of course, because George was the final word on it, and he liked Don's work quite a bit. So, we immediately sending Don scripts, and he did *The Phantom*, a lot of ghost stories, and even some of the painted covers you were talking about, because Don liked to paint.

CBA: *Were you aware of Don's vocation, his daytime job?*

Nick: Oh, as a teacher? Yeah, I know, he told me about that, and I knew he was teaching school while he was doing comics. I even created a super-hero that I wanted to do with Don, Mastermind, which he did some rough sketches for, and it never came about. His power was that he could use his mind, sort of like Mandrake the Magician without hypnotism. He could use his mind to sort of create all kinds of strange things, and was from another dimension where mental powers were very common, and now he's trapped in our dimension in which no one had developed mental powers, but he did.

CBA: *Did you have any other ideas for super hero or adventure characters?*

Nick: Gee, not that I recall right now, E-Man and Mastermind were the only ones I can think of. Like I said, I wasn't a great super hero fan, so I never really came up with that many.

CBA: *I guess what I mean is for serialized characters, for continuing characters.*

Nick: I don't think so. I liked anthologies, writing a story where you never quite knew if the hero was going to come out successful or be devastated by his problems. I kind of liked that knowing that you never knew if the hero or heroine was going to survive at the end.

CBA: *Did you have any appreciation for what Steve Ditko and Jack Kirby were doing with the super hero milieu?*

Nick: Oh, yeah. I loved *Spider-Man* and *Fantastic Four*.

CBA: *So there was a validity to it, that you could do something.*

Nick: Oh, absolutely. I just felt that super-heroes didn't deserve to take over the entire industry.

CBA: *And so E-Man, in its way, was a statement upon it.*

Nick: It was a reaction.

CBA: *But didn't you simultaneously develop Mastermind with Don? Wasn't that a more straight adventure super-hero strip?*

Nick: Well, it turned out I was having so much fun doing *E-Man* that I wanted to do more and so that's the reason. I loved Don Newton's work.

CBA: *So that was not as simultaneous as E-Man? That was after?*

Nick: That was after E-Man.

CBA: *So, it was going to be one single book coming out from Charlton for super heroes?*

Nick: Well, no. We were doing *E-Man* and *Yang*.

CBA: *Okay, so they saw Yang as a super hero book?*

Nick: They saw that as a super-hero book.

CBA: *And* The Phantom*?*

Nick: And we had that feature in the back of *E-Man* where we were trying out different super heroes, hoping that one would catch on with the audience and we could expand it into a book. So they were being very careful about this because if we were competing with DC and Marvel, who were the kings, we wanted to try it out and see if the public would accept another super-hero group. And they didn't. *E-Man*, as I said, wasn't a successful book. It eventually became a fan favorite, but at the time we were putting it out, it really wasn't a successful book. But I loved doing it and one of my favorites when I was a kid, one of my favorite super-heroes was Plastic Man. I loved Jack Cole's Plastic Man. I thought it was hysterical. And so when I was trying to think of a unique super-hero, I thought of E-Man because Einstein was also a boyhood hero of mine. I used to read up on the Theories of Relativity and so forth. And so I just combined the two concepts of Albert Einstein's Theories of Relativity with Jack Cole's Plastic Man and E-Man was born.

CBA: *George Wildman said you wrote a mean Popeye.*

Nick: Well, thank you. That's very nice to hear.

CBA: *Were you a fan of E.C. Segar's stuff?*

Nick: I'll be honest with you, not really.

CBA: *So if you were given an assignment, you'd just go off with it, no matter the genre?*

Nick: Right. Not that I d slike Popeye. When I was a kid, I used to read *Popeye* comics al the time in the newspaper. But that wasn't a particular favorite of mine. It wasn't something I was going after, or wanted to do. George offered me the opportunity and I took it.

CBA: *Did you write any of those* Popeye *informational comics?*

Nick: As a matter of fact, I did. I wrote a few of those but I wasn't credited with those because it was through King Features.

CBA: *Did George actively want to promote comics as educational tools?*

Nick: I believe King Features approached us with the concepts. I wrote some. Joe Gi I wrote a lot of it.

CBA: *The audience you're dealing with is primarily adolescent boys and that they're looking for. I don't think it would be fair to say "violent"—but certainly provocative material to look at.*

Nick: Well, I agree. I know why super-heroes became as strong as they did. Because they're every little boy's fantasy. Someday, if I say "Shazam!," I'm going to have super powers and can fly and all the girls will love me and I can tear buildings down, and so forth. But at the same time, I still resented the fact that *that's* all there was.

CBA: *In magazines, it's the strong arm of distribution, at times, which can make or break a publishing company. Charlton always had a reputation, true or not, of being mob influenced, arguably because it was simply headed by an Italian family. Did you ever get that impression from working there?*

Nick: No, as a matter of fact, I never did. I had heard of how it got started with John Santangelo Sr., and his partner Eugene Levey. But there was never any, at least as far as I could see, any mob influence at Charlton at all. I have a feeling that a lot of those stories were because of the prejudice of the fact that it was run by, and created by, an Italian immigrant. So, naturally, there was an assumption that if it was created by an Italian immigrant, it's gotta be mob-influenced.

CBA: *Did Charlton distribute* Hustler *magazine?*

Nick: Yeah. As a matter of fact, I was there for the first issue.

CBA: *Did you meet Larry Flynt?*

Nick: I never met him. I know he was there because every so often, someone would say, "Oh, Larry Flynt is in John Santangelo's office right now," and things like that. But I never even saw him there. You know, the comics were in a little corner of the whole place.

CBA: Hustler *was printed in Derby?*

Nick: I think the first few issues were. Again, I wasn't involved in the magazine so I don't really know, but I think the first few issues of *Hustler* were printed right there in Derby. In fact, I'd almost swear to it because I think I went downstairs a few times and I saw all those naked ladies coming off the presses and I says, "Oh *Hustler!*" [*laughs*] Now that I remember.

CBA: *Was it extreme when it initially came out?*

Nick: I think it was pretty extreme for its time and it's even more extreme now, but at the time, it was pretty wild.

CBA: *Were you surprised that Charlton was printing it?*

Nick: Not really. I was surprised that they had gone into publishing a girly magazine but Charlton, as I said, was a schlock outfit that would publish whatever it felt it could make money on.

CBA: *Do you remember quick responses to media events that the magazine division would suddenly jump on? Did they come out with one-shots?*

Nick: Yeah, they did and they would look around to see what was popular at the time. We did a series of magazines on the occult. You know, mind-reading and ghosts and all that because it had become very popular during the '50s to look down upon the supernatural. There's no such thing as ghosts, I think. It was something that came around the '50s. But then as the New Age came in, people started getting more and more interested in the occult and the supernatural. Charlton jumped on the bandwagon and published some magazines in that area. So, they're no different than any other magazine company. What's popular, they're going to try to jump on because that's what sells more magazines.

CBA: *Were you there when* Hustler *was not distributed by Charlton any more?*

Nick: I remember there being a big controversy about that. Again I was not privy to that.

CBA: *But there was an uproar around the office?*

Nick: Yeah, there was. I remember I just happened to be in John Santangelo, Jr.'s office one time when he was talking to Larry Flynt and he hung up the phone angrily and looked at me and said, "Our man Flynt," which was a takeoff of a movie by the same name.

CBA: *Not said with affection, I would assume?*

Nick: Not with affection. [*laughs*] Not with affection.

CBA: *So that was a very lucrative contract that suddenly left Charlton's hands.*

Nick: Yeah, I was a little bit disappointed when I saw the Larry Flynt film, the one with Woody Harrelson, and they made absolutely no mention of Charlton at all. And they were the ones who gave Flynt his first publishing, you know. They took a chance on him and I was a little disappointed about that. I felt that Charlton should have been, at least, mentioned.

Above: *Promotion shot of Captain Cosmos and company in action! Behind Nick Cuti as the Good Captain are (left) Amanda Ellery as Cadet Starling and Danielle Marie Mays as Zen-ya. ©2001 and courtesy of Nicola Cuti.*

CBA: *You look over the history of mainstream comics and there's not much variation in genre, at least in the last 30 years of existence. It's been predominantly super hero and yet you always seem to flirt around the genre and take the best of the remaining. Yeah, you wrote a lot of love stories and Westerns, you wrote s-f.*

Nick: When I was a young boy, super heroes were only maybe 20% of comic books. I always considered that to be just one of the

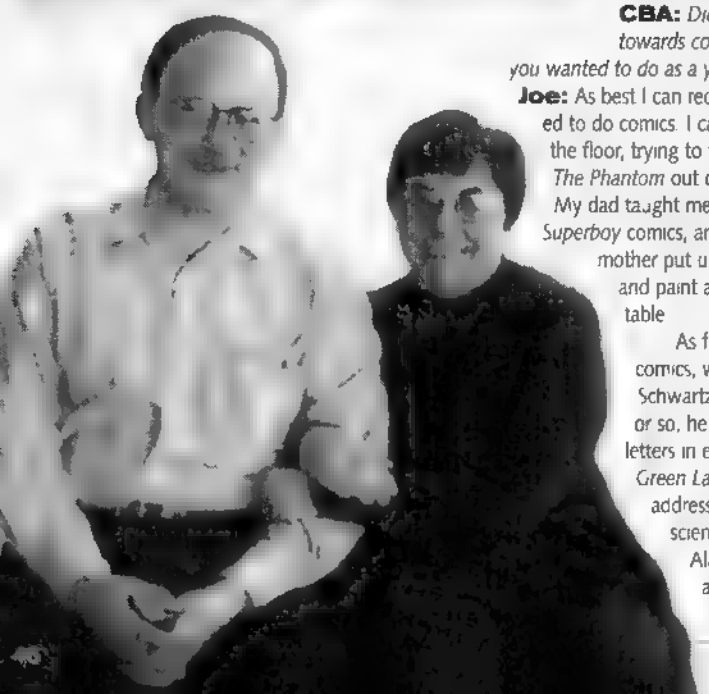
continued on page 110

Joe Staton, Man of Energy!

The prolific cartoonist on E-Man, Mauser & Charlton Comics

Conducted by Rocco Nigro
Transcribed by Jon B. Knutson

As far as CBA is concerned, Joe Staton can do no wrong. Not only was he (and interviewer Rocco Nigro) patient enough to wait over six months for the following interview to appear, but the onetime Charlton star artist also drew us a spiffy new "From Horror to Heroes" cover plus he illustrated Nick Cuti's E-Man script for us, featured as our delightful centerspread! Joe has worked for just about everybody, from DC to Marvel to First (serving as the latter's initial art director), but perhaps his Charlton material is his most endearing work, dramatic yet whimsical, alternating between frolic and fear with the ease of an accomplished confident cartoonist. This interview was conducted in Joe's New York home on March 23, 2000, and features brief and welcome interludes with his wife of 25+ years, Hilarie. Joe was also kind enough to expand on some topics via e-mail at the last minute. The artist copy-edited the transcript.



Below: *Joe and Hilarie Staton on their 1970 honeymoon visit to Charlton Press. Ah, romance in Derby! Courtesy of Joe Staton.*
Bottom: *Still an item, it's Joe and Hilarie, photographed by Rocco Nigro this past January. Courtesy of Rocco Nigro.*

Comic Book Artist: *Joe, when were you born?*
Joe Staton: January 19, 1948. I grew up in Tennessee, and graduated Milan High School in 1966. Then I attended Murray State University, graduating in 1970.
CBA: *Did you gravitate towards comics as something you wanted to do as a youngster?*
Joe: As best I can recall, I've always wanted to do comics. I can remember sitting on the floor, trying to trace *Dick Tracy* and *The Phantom* out of the Sunday funnies. My dad taught me to read from *Superboy* comics, and my long-suffering mother put up with me getting ink and paint all over the kitchen table.

As for me getting into comics, we can blame Julie Schwartz. Back when I was 12 or so, he ran a couple of my letters in early issues of *JLA* and *Green Lantern*, and he ran addresses. Bil Plott, a science-fiction fan from Alabama, saw my letter and sent me a s-f fanzine and through that connection, I got into s-f fandom, especially fanzine fandom. That's where I got accustomed to drawing for publication and for deadline, and made the acquaintance of artists and writers, and eventually the people who formed my support network in New York when I headed that way. I was active for a long time in the Southern Fandom Press Alliance. Through SFPA I made contact with fanzine fans all over the country. Via Buck and Juanita Coulson's *Yandro*, I made the acquaintance of Dan Adkins, who, though he tended to be a bit pessimistic, was generous with advice about making a living as an artist. I got in contact with a fan group in St. Louis which centered around Ray and Joyce Fisher. I spent a lot of time on Greyhound buses and in the St. Louis bus station to hang out with them. Just as a sidenote, the St. Louis group included Chris Couch, who is now editor over at *CPM Manga*. In St. Louis, I met an painter named Mickey Rhoades, who I think was the first in-the-flesh person I knew who was making a living as an artist. It was important to know there were people out there who did that. Through SFPA, I got to know people in the LASFAS circle in Los Angeles and of course the Fanoclasts and Insurgents in Brooklyn. Good ol' Steve Stiles, a really good cartoonist from that circle, put me up when I moved to New York. (Truth be told, I was sort of left on Steve's doorstep, but that's another story.)
CBA: *How did you and your wife Hilarie meet?*
Joe: How about we met somewhere off the coast of South America in 1968. Or more likely the North Atlantic. There is a college program in which you take classes on an ocean liner and visit ports enroute, with the ports more or less tying into the class content. When we attended in my junior year, it was called World Campus Afloat and was out of Chapman College in California. (These days it's called Semester at Sea and is, I think, run by the University of Pittsburgh.) I came on from Murray, Kentucky, and Hilarie is a native Angeleno.

First time I became aware of Hilarie, we were in an art history class and the teacher was having various people in class give little lectures on their interests. Not surprisingly, I gave one on the history of comic books. Hilarie's hand popped up and she asked me about the history of animation. At the time, I knew nothing about animation, and my response was something like, "Uh, duhh..." She put me in my place even before we were properly introduced.

We did, of course, get to be on better terms, but at the end of the semester I went back to school in Kentucky and Hilarie headed back to Los Angeles. When we graduated, I headed for New York. Hilarie was in Special Ed and Ronald Reagan had started cutting the education budgets in California. She had relatives on Long Island, so she came East to look for a teaching job. So we both wound up in New York. And that's how we got together.
CBA: *When did you start working at Charlton?*
Joe: That was in April 1971.
CBA: *By that point, was George Wildman the managing editor?*
Joe: Well, when I went in to see Sal [*Gentile, managing editor of the comics line*], George was there then [*as a freelancer*], and Sal retired about a year into that, I would guess about a year later.
CBA: *So, did you work with Sal at all?*
Joe: Oh, yeah, I got my first assignment from Sal, and he inked me on some stuff.
CBA: *So Sal was an artist himself?*
Joe: Yeah.
CBA: *Was his background in comics before Charlton as an editor?*
Joe: I don't really know. I know he did work on the romance books, but I don't know what his background was before that.

CBA: *So, you'd get the assignments from Sal, and the scripts would be from whoever was working for Charlton at that time, like Joe Gill?*

Joe: Mostly Joe Gill. I think Joe wrote a script in the morning, a script in the afternoon, and .. [*laughter*] He'd just sit there and write scripts!

CBA: *Did you ever meet Steve Ditko during the Charlton years?*

Joe: No, I met Ditko later at DC, and never during the Charlton years. I had messages relayed from him, but I never met him at that time.

CBA: *So, he was aware of your work at Charlton when you were doing it?*

Joe: That's what George told me. When I first went into Charlton, George was trying to tell me what they wanted, and he said, "Try to come in between these two guys," and he went and got a bunch of Ditko's pages and a Jim Aparo "Wander" story and gave the originals to me for reference, so I was working toward Ditko at the start, and occasionally they would relay to me a message that Ditko liked what I was doing, he liked the angles.

CBA: *That's a big compliment.*

Joe: Yeah, I liked it. Jim Aparo and I were at the Big Apple Charlton Show this past September and I returned the eight page "Wander" story to him. I told him I'd been holding on to it for him for the past 29 years. He said it was the only Charlton art he'd ever gotten back.

CBA: *So, when you met Ditko at DC, how was that encounter?*

Joe: It was just a little hero-worship, but he was polite, and seemed to be aware of me, so I guess that's the way it's always been.

CBA: *I've been looking through all the Charltons, and the three names I saw the most were Steve Ditko, your name, and Pat Boyette. Pat Boyette just did volumes of work there, and it seemed like all three of you guys—including Ditko, though not as much—did romance comics.*

Joe: I did some romance, I don't remember Ditko doing any romance.

CBA: *It's weird. I was going through these Charlton books, and Charles Nicholas seemed to draw everything. There was one story that was his, and I don't know if Ditko just happened to be there for the day, but there were two pages drawn by Steve! It made me think. Even though DC and Marvel were phasing out of doing all the genres—DC didn't have that much in the way of romance and westerns and Marvel gave up on horror and romance—Charlton kept plugging away.*

Joe: Well, DC and Marvel didn't have hot rod books!

CBA: *Yeah, they didn't have hot rod books! [laughter] Well, DC had* Hot Wheels *for a little brief period.*

Joe: Great art. Toth and Dick [Giordano].

CBA: *Yeah!*

Joe: And Joe Gill wrote that book.

CBA: *I just re-read a bunch of* E-Man, *so that was a lot of fun because I haven't read those in some time [laughter] and they hold up really well.*

Joe: I think they do. I think that run was good.

CBA: *You had a ten-issue run, did you get any indication what the sales were like?*

Joe: I never really knew, but sales just weren't good enough to keep going after ten issues.

CBA: *The writer of* E-Man, *Nicola Cuti, did he start working at Charlton the same time you did?*

Joe: He was George Wildman's assistant, so when Sal retired and George moved up, George hired Nick to be his assistant (Nick had previously been one of Wally Wood's assistants). Eventually, Nick moved over to DC to be an editor.

CBA: *Is Nick Cuti as nice as he seems?*

Joe: No, of course not, nobody could possibly be that nice. In fact, Nick is a really rotten guy who only pretends to be the nicest person you ever met, so he can sneak around and steal your shoes and pocket change. [*laughter*] You realize I'm kidding, right? I'd say Nick is one of the Good Guys—the enthusiasm is *real*, the kindness is *real*. Nick and I are definitely still pals. There's nothing quite like sitting around watching old *Space Cadet* videos with Nick. One way I am still involved with Nick is through his *Captain Cosmos* project. I'm sure he'll tell you all about it, but that's his retro-SF property, starring a spaceman much like Nick himself. He is dedicated to placing the property. Every couple of years, Nick writes and I draw an issue of a comic book telling the adventures of the good Captain. When he meets with producers, that gives Nick something a little different to leave to remind them. This past summer at San Diego, I helped Nick

Below: *Cover by Joe Staton for the fanzine* FreeFall, *edited by Mike Main, featuring Primus and E-Man (and friends) and a by-mail interview by a 16-year-old Paul "Concrete" Chadwick! Courtesy of Paul. Art & E-Man (and related characters) ©2001 Joe Staton. Primus ©2001 the respective copyright holder.*

Above: *Working the con. Nick Cuti (left, and Joe & Hilarie Staton pause for a photo at an early '70s comic convention. Courtesy of Joe Staton.* **Below:** *Joe's E-Man and Nova drawing for The Charlton Portfolio. Courtesy of Bob Layton & CPL/Gang Productions. ©2001 Joe Staton*

man his *Captain Cosmos* table.

CBA: *In the E-Man letter pages, some fans wrote that they had seen your work in the science-fiction magazines...*

Joe: *Amazing, Fantastic.*

CBA: *Right. Were the people at Charlton aware of that work? Did that help you get jobs?*

Joe: [*laughs*] No, I just went in blind.

CBA: *So you were hitting on all the publishers at the time?*

Joe: Yeah, I'd been trying to get work with Marvel and DC, and I'd done some work for Warren—one, two, three stories, something like that.

CBA: *You've mentioned you did one story for an early* Eerie *or* Creepy *like #44, which Steve Skeates wrote.*

Joe: Okay, I'll take that. [*laughter*] I also did a story for Warren that showed up in something Sal Quartuccio published years later. I don't know if there were more, I think that was it. I wasn't getting any work from Marvel or DC, and I had actually decided to go back to school. I was going to go to Hunter College, to be in museum restorations, and I had quit my regular job. I'd gotten married the day before I got work at Charlton. [*laughter*] That's my favorite story. We were very broke, so Mystic, Connecticut was as far as we could get for a honeymoon, but Derby was between New York and Mystic, so I asked Sal if I could show him my stuff. Sal agreed, Hilarie and I stopped at Derby on the way to Mystic, met Sal, and he gave me some work. That's why I know exactly when I started at Charlton, the day after I got married.

CBA: *Wow. The science-fiction stuff you'd been doing were interior drawings or covers?*

Joe: I did some covers, a lot of interiors. Ted White was editor of *Amazing* and *Fantastic*. I'd been a science-fiction fan in Brooklyn, and was still connected to s-f fandom. I was in a group called "The Fanoclasts" and another one called "The Insurgents." That all kind of circled around Ted, so I had ties with Ted from science-fiction. I think Nick was aware of that, because he also had a lot of connections in the field.

CBA: *Did you get a full script from Nick for* E-Man *#1?*

Joe: I'd done a lot of Nick's science-fiction and horror stories at Charlton, and was accustomed to how he worked. He'd just mark off a sheet of typing paper and draw up five boxes in it, and there'd be dialog and some descriptions, and he'd do it in pencil like that. Eventually, he went to typing out his scripts full script, but I don't remember if the first issue of *E-Man* was done out in pencil or if it was typed out, but whatever it was, it was a finished script.

CBA: *E-Man #1 has such a smooth flow, the humor making fun of super-heroes, but still being a super-hero comic, and even the relationship between Nova and E-Man, when she meets E-Man, she's a little bit shocked, but she doesn't really ask anything about him. [laughter] She's like, "Let's go on with the story!" One could tell you had a lot of fun.*

Joe: He popped out of a light bulb, right?

Hilarie Staton: Nick and Joe would talk about on the phone a lot about what would happened in the story.

Joe: Yeah, but mostly Nick would come up with stuff, and sometimes I'd kind of say, "Nick, this isn't gonna work," and he'd say, "Trust me," and I'd do what he said, and it worked! So, that's what a lot of the stuff turned out to be.

CBA: *You mentioned you were doing a lot of stories before Nick. Why don't we just start with your first work for Charlton, which was...*

Joe: I think my first work was a horror story.

Hilarie: Nope, I think they gave you a romance to try you out, that's what I remember.

Joe: I did some romance when I started, but I thought the first story was a ghost story, but...

Hilarie: It was for an anthology title.

Joe: Oh, yeah, they were all anthology titles. You had one editor and an assistant doing somewhere between 20 and 30 books at Charlton!

CBA: *It's really amazing how many books and titles they had, and then some of the genres crossed, like there's* Haunted Love.

Joe: I worked on *Haunted Love*. [*laughter*]

CBA: *Do you know they made a magnet of one of your covers?*

Joe: No! [*laughter*]

CBA: *They made a magnet right out of one of those Charlton covers, and I was like, "I didn't even know they did* Haunted Love*." So, you went in and started doing romance, horror, and science-fiction.*

Joe: Maybe not so much science-fiction, most of it was pretty much horror or suspense, whichever. But there were science-fiction stories in the horror books, like space horror stories and stuff like that.

CBA: *Your first regular series would be* Primus?

Joe: Yeah.

CBA: *I guess you'd better tell people what* Primus *was. [laughter]*

Joe: I'm sure it's gonna show up on cable any day now. *Primus* was a licensed character from Ivan Tors (the producer of *Sea Hunt*) and it starred Robert Brown (who starred in *Here Come the Brides*). It was another skin-diver TV show, set in Florida, and there was a lot of international intrigue and stuff. It had a lot of potential, but it was shot so cheaply that there wasn't a lot on the screen, really. Joe Gill wrote the comic, and he would throw in all kinds of stuff. Lots of

spies, drug smuggling

CBA: *The drug smuggling one is mentioned in the* Overstreet Price Guide

Joe: It was before the Code allowed drug stories

CBA: Primus *#2 has a photo-cover, which is unusual for Charlton.*

Joe: Sal liked to do photo-covers, he'd get carried away with them and spend days cutting up photos and making stills, collages Somebody remarked how Sal would get lost for hours, putting those covers together

CBA: *Now, was that something they did often with the properties they licensed?*

Joe: I think they did it in the teenage magazines a lot

CBA: *For a show I don't think was all that popular [lasting 26 episodes in 1971], the comic lasted seven issues—over a year! [laughter] That's pretty amazing, considering the show wasn't even being aired in reruns. [laughter]*

Joe: I know Basically, Charlton had those licenses, and the licensees wanted to keep the property going somehow That's how Charlton ended up with the Hanna-Barbera stuff When I'd talk to people there, that's what they'd tell me, so that Charlton could keep books going longer than anybody else, just because they had such low overhead. At one point, George told me that Charlton came within half a day of having the rights to *Super Friends*, because DC didn't notice they should be picking it up, and Charlton almost got it with a package of other things *[laughter]* It should've happened! *[laughter]*

CBA: *Charlton not only picked up live-action shows like* Emergency!, Six Million Dollar Man, The Bionic Woman, Space: 1999, *but then the cartoons, like* Yogi Bear, Top Cat, *and even some of the strip-related stuff, like* Hi and Lois, Abbott and Costello, Blondie, The Phantom *and*

Joe: Yeah, after King Comics went down, they picked up *Flash Gordon* and *Mandrake*

CBA: Flash Gordon

Joe: I think they picked up *Jungle Jim*, they did some real nice covers

CBA: *And Steve Ditko with Wally Wood did some great work for Charlton It seems odd, here were these properties that Charlton would pick up, and in some cases, they'd have a really long run, and in some cases, like Jungle Jim, it didn't seem to last very long*

Joe: They had a very long run with *The Phantom* And they had a long run on *The Flintstones* and the spin-offs. I mean, Dino whatever he was, got his own book, and that space guy, The Great Gazoo, who granted people wishes

CBA: *I even think there was a series of* Pebbles & Bamm Bamm *It seemed like* The Flintstones *stuff was doing really well for them*

Joe: That had a long run, they did better with *The Jetsons* than Gold Key

CBA: *The story is that the reason Charlton was so cheap with its page rates was because comics weren't their bread-and-butter*

Joe: The things that I was told were told while I was there, or I heard otherwise (but Nick could tell all this stuff first-hand), was it was cheaper to publish comics than it was to shut the presses down Originally the comics were just filler, to keep the presses going.

Hilarie: Didn't they start out doing sheet music?

Joe: Yeah, the story was that the guys met in prison, started publishing sheet music, and went into *Tiger Beat* and things like that Charlton was mixed up somehow in Monarch Books, I think—I don't know if they published them or not, but that was all connected They published anything and did it cheaply At one point, they had a deal with somebody where they'd reprint their old comics under the Modern Comics logo That was kind of at random, with no numerical order or anything

CBA: *All right. So, you went from* Primus *to drawing a lot of other TV properties. You worked on* Emergency

Joe: That was a lot later From *Primus* to ghost stories and romances and then *E-Man* came up

CBA: So E-Man *comes in before* Space: 1999 *and* Emergency!

Joe: Right. I think I went on to *Six Million Dollar Man* after *E-Man* was canceled don't swear to any of this timeframe, *[laughter]* I've got to remember the sequence Maybe somebody knows this better

Hilarie: Tell him the *Six Million Dollar Man* reference story

Joe: We had moved upstate by the time I was working on *Six Million Dollar Man* actually, I moved up, I'd just finished *Primus*. Because I was working on *E-Man* up here doing *The Six Million Dollar Man* up here, and we lived way out, even past Jim Starlin *[laughs]* Did we have a TV?

Hilarie: We were in West Shokan then We did have a TV, but we only got one station from Connecticut

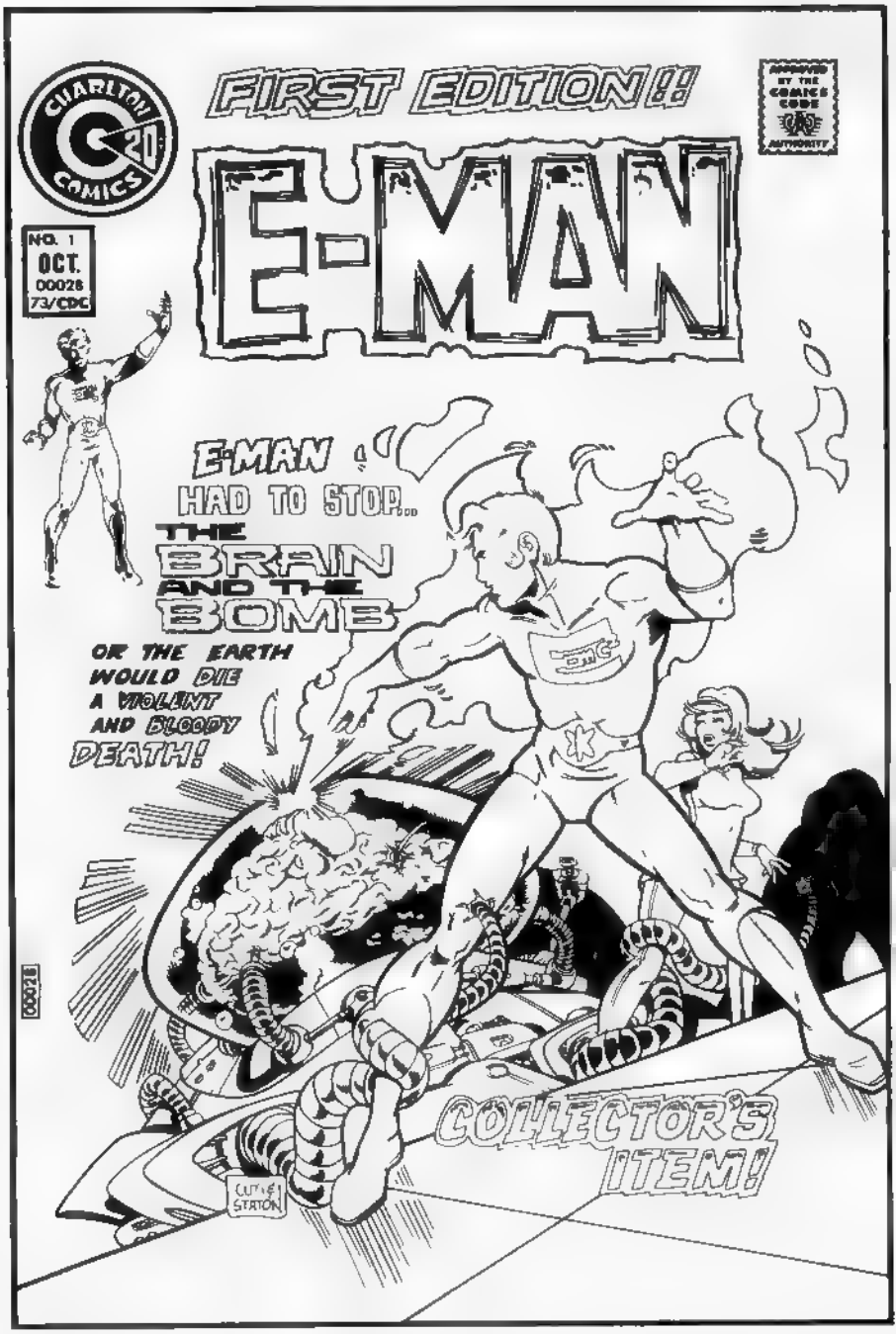
Joe: One station from Connecticut, and Universal would never give you enough reference on anything, on any of these licensed properties, so we didn't get *The Six Million Dollar Man* on the TV But we needed to get some reference, they just gave me a few photos, and not much else

CBA: *And this was pre-VCR days*

Joe: Oh, right! *[laughs]* I lost my train of thought there Now, if you need reference, you just

Hilarie: Hop on the net!

Joe: Hop on the net, or you tape it in the middle of the night, whatever you need is always on, or you get the video tape, or if you're working for Disney, they have a video capture system and just print shots from the tape. I was just recently doing something for DC's Special Projects, and the client downloaded some animation on the internet, so Hilarie ran it for me back and forth until I had what I needed Everything is much nicer now! *[laughter]* Back in the days



Above: *Nick & Joe's cover art to Charlton's dramatic reentry into the super hero genre,* E-Man *#1 ©2001 Joe Staton.*

Above and below: *Staton character designs for Monster Hunter host, Col White-Shroud ©2001 the respective copyright holder* **Center inset:** *Joe's logo treatment for Mike Mauser ©2001 Joe Staton.*

when dinosaurs drew comic books, we had one TV station, didn't get the show, we didn't have any photos so we came into town to the Ramada Inn in Kingston here, got a room, because somebody told us the Ramada Inn got the station it was on. [*laughter*] We didn't have a tripod, so we piled up some books under Hilarie's camera in front of the TV in the hotel room, trying to shoot photos off the television! That was most of the reference I had for the book

CBA: *Wow! That's devotion! [laughter]*

Joe: There was always a lot of trouble to get the reference. For *Six Million Dollar Man*, we called up an Air Force airbase, the same airbase the Six Million Dollar Man crashes on in the pilot episode, and they sent me this whole official pile of photos on airbases. If I were a Russian spy... [*laughter*] If anybody needs good photos of secret defense installations, call up and say you're doing a comic book [*laughter*] and the Air Force is very accommodating!

CBA: *So, you were doing all the licensed stuff in the middle of all the other projects you were getting from Charlton—the horror and romance?*

Joe: Just the horror stuff. I didn't stay on romance too long. They wound down the romance stuff. I think Nick wrote a lot of romances. Nick wrote a lot of everything.

Hilarie: I used to read the romances, and I was very disappointed when titles like *Haunted Love* disappeared because I used to enjoy the Gothic stuff, remember?

Joe: Yeah.

CBA: *Somewhere along the line, Charlton got into magazines, and there was* Emergency!, *which had covers by Neal Adams.*

Joe: Yeah. Neal's studio did a bunch of that stuff.

Hilarie: And *Space: 1999*, Gray [*Morrow*] was on that one.

Joe: Right, yeah. We all went to an ITC presentation promoting *Space: 1999*, and they gave us a nice preview of the first episode and Joe Gill was there, and anytime something was about to happen (and Joe had never seen the episode before), he'd say, "Okay, now he's going to do such-and-so," and then the guy would do exactly what Joe said! And then he'd say, "Okay, now she's got to say..." and the gal would do it! [*laughter*] Joe had all these plots in his head, and he could tell you which ones they were using, click, click, click.

CBA: *He was always thinking!*

Joe: Yeah, and he would figure it out.

CBA: *That's probably how he was able to produce so many stories.*

Joe: Yeah, plot number 84B, whoops, there it goes! [*laughter*]

CBA: *Now, did you ever meet Joe face-to-face?*

Joe: Yeah. I met him up at Charlton a couple of times, and hung out with him at some conventions. He was a character and a funny guy. It's hard to describe him... kind of like Popeye [*laughter*]. Is that fair? His favorite story he always told me: he was sitting with Mickey Spillane, and since Spillane was writing comics, he tells Joe Gill about this idea he has for a detective, and Joe tells him, "Forget it. It'll never sell." [*laughter*]

CBA: *You worked as an assistant to Gil Kane?*

Joe: Right.

CBA: *What time would that be, roughly?*

Joe: I think I was still on *E-Man*, I'm not sure. I know Gil had seen *E-Man*, and he said I composed panels in depth, which is what he did, so he wanted me to do layouts for him. So, that's what I did for less than a year, but somewhere in there.

CBA: *So this would've been mostly Marvel assignments?*

Joe: Yeah. No DC stuff, it was mostly all Marvel... some *Spider-Man*, a *Conan*, a *Ghost Rider*...

CBA: *Gil was all over the place at that point.*

Joe: There was one thing that I wish I could see of his—if somebody knows if it exists or if it was done—it was a graphic novel (called an album then, for somebody in Europe) titled *Jason Drumm*. It was similar to his *Blackmark*, and I did rough layouts for that. It was like this big, heroic fantasy on some alien world. I did a lot of stuff for that, and I never heard if it was published, never heard if he finished the pages, or what happened with it. If it exists, I'd love to see it. Oh, yes, and I did layouts for that unpublished issue of *The Prisoner* that keeps on turning up in *Comic Book Artist*. That was a hard thing to get reference on. There was somebody in Boston who had film of the show, and would get me some stills, and I think Marv Wolfman was putting it together, and he had some reference. That was terrible for me, and nobody had pictures of that Lotus car.

That was a weird episode. It's strange seeing those things I did layouts for turning up now, I thought they were gone for years. I had no memory of what it looked like. I have vague memories of being out at Marv's apartment when we were talking about this thing, and there was talk of Gene Colan doing a sequence about the CIA infiltrating The Village, and I don't know if that was ever drawn, and if it exists.

CBA: *It was just an espionage type story?*

Joe: Yeah, and I thought Colan would be the perfect artist for *The Prisoner*, but I don't know if he ever actually did them or not. I thought it was something that...

CBA: *So this was related to* The Prisoner, *this CIA story?*

Joe: It was a *Prisoner* story, and would take place in The Village, the CIA working against Number Six, and not knowing if it was their Village, or somebody else's Village... a very surreal thing. Somebody should ask Gene if he was ever even approached for it, but I have memories of that coming up.

CBA: *Was the experience with Gil Kane good? Was that a good learning experience, or was it just Gil saw your abilities, and said, "This is the guy who can make work for me, and we can work well together"?*

Joe: It was good! I mean, Gil is my hero. I tell everybody that Gil Kane died owing me money, and he died being my hero. [*laughter*] I don't think he ever paid me for the last job I did for him, and every time we'd see each other at a con, we'd make a joke about it, so it was just a running thing, but Gil was always going to owe me money!

CBA: *Was this for* The Life of The Flash, *or another project altogether?*

Joe: Oh, it was probably for the Jason Drumm stuff, probably '74 or '75.

CBA: *I was thinking the last thing you'd done was that* Flash *graphic novel.*

Joe: Oh, that was for DC, and they just remembered I used to "be" Gil. [*laughter*] The book was something like two years late, and they need 40 pages by next Tuesday. So by 4:30, I was back where started, doing layouts for Gil. [*laughs*]

CBA: *How did DC find out that you worked with Gil?*

Joe: It's just one of those secrets everybody knew.

CBA: *So, in a way, you were working for Marvel, and Marvel didn't know about it.*

Joe: Right.

CBA: *I'm assuming you went to Marvel to get work?*

Joe: Right, but I was never actually able to get work there on my own at the time, but I worked through Gil. I guess when Roy Thomas called me to start inking *The Avengers*, that was independently based

on my work on *E-Man* as well. I was never able to really get penciling work—although I was penciling for Marvel "disguised" as Gil—I was never able to get penciling work from Marvel under my own name.

CBA: *When you were doing the layouts for Gil, were you working consciously in a Gil Kane mode?*

Joe: Oh, sure, I was trying to "be" Gil, and would take everything of his that I had and try to understand his layouts, his figures... I think I came pretty close. I never understood how he constructed heads, but the figures and the especially way he told a story, I think I was real close.

CBA: *What about the nose?*

Joe: Everybody talks about that! [*laughter*]

CBA: *Everybody asks, "What about those noses that Gil Kane draws?"*

Joe: I know you're joking about the "up the nose shot." But I could never figure out how he constructed skulls, to get the nose like that. That was something I couldn't quite do. So, probably if I could've figured out how he did skulls, I could've gotten penciling work.

CBA: *And you also tried DC at that point?*

Joe: Yeah, I tried everybody.

CBA: *A lot of people would say that your work is more cartoony, which is your own natural style, yet you're able to do this Gil Kane type work, understanding how he does the layouts. Yet the thing I noticed—that really surprised me—and I even see it in your work now at DC with* Scooby-Doo *(but even more so with this Charlton stuff that's licensed) is your ability to capture likenesses.* Space 1999, The Six Million Dollar Man, *and* Emergency! *It seems odd to me that someone who's got that kind of ability, you'd think DC and Marvel would've jumped on giving you work. But that doesn't seem to be the case, because there's a big gap between doing even the* E-Man *stuff and then getting regular work from even DC, and certainly Marvel, it was a lot later, I believe.*

Joe: I don't remember the exact timeframe, but yeah, Roy Thomas hired me at Marvel, and then Paul Levitz hired me at DC from Marvel, because I was still looking to do penciling work. Even though I was working for Marvel, I couldn't get any penciling. I wanted to do some penciling along with some inking. I was spoiled at Charlton, doing everything.

CBA: *At that point, you weren't doing any more Charlton work?*

Joe: There was a transition period that I don't remember at all, I know I kept on doing work for Charlton as long as I could, I must've just eventually got overbooked with everything else. I don't remember how the transition came.

CBA: *So Paul Levitz gave you the chance to pencil, based on your inking?*

Joe: Well, he originally hired me to do finishes, I was doing finishes at Marvel on *The Hulk* and *The Avengers*, and Paul hired me to do finishes in *Karate Kid* and eventually he let me do some penciling, so I was able to make the transition.

CBA: *You did beautifully painted covers for those Charlton books...*

Joe: We did the painted covers because Charlton found some outfit down in Texas that could do separations for paintings cheaper than they could have the covers hand-separated. It was cheaper to do the painted covers.

CBA: *Did you like the look of those? Those were kind of unique looking, even on the racks I remember looking at them, and they stood out.*

Joe: Yeah, they were fun. They came out kind of flat sometimes, some of them got washed out.

CBA: *Yeah, some of them got kind of muddy, too. I remember one of* The Six Million Dollar Man, *and then there's a* Space: 1999 *that has a red background, and it's like, wow, they really stuck out on the rack. My next question, I guess, would be back to* E-Man. *When the ten issues were done, and then Charlton, many years later, started to break off and reform itself in different guises and duration's, where does E-Man stand now? Do you own the copyright with Nick?*

Joe: This is complicated. [*laughter*] The deal with *E-Man* was that I had an arrangement with First Comics so that they bought the rights to *E-Man* from Charlton, and then I was to repay First all their expense out of my royalties. The rights to *E-Man* were then supposed to revert to me completely. But some of us needed more lawyers than we knew, and the end result of how it stands, as I understand it, is that I have the right to do any new E-Man stories I want to, and I have the right to license any new E-Man material I want. Ken Levin, the lawyer for First, controls the rights to what First published. To keep the rights unified, Ken and I decided he would represent the whole E-Man package. Ken's the lawyer and he has lots of contacts in Hollywood, so any inquiries I get, I refer to Ken, then I call Nick. So, we're partners by default.

CBA: *Oh, so you willingly split it with Nick, or is that one of the agreements in whatever contract that exists?*

Joe: No, that's the agreement between me and Nick, so whatever I get in, Nick gets 50%, but so far, it's been nothing. [*laughs*]

CBA: *It sounds like it ended as peacefully as it could without going to lawyers and court battles and stuff.*

Joe: Right, I think how things worked out, if anything actually develops, I'm in a better position with Ken being able to control things and deal with the legal parts and the representation.

CBA: *So if you wanted to, right now, you can do a new* E-Man *series.*

Joe: Yep.

CBA: *So if DC said, "Hey, we want to do a mini series with E-Man"*

Joe: Well, actually, DC *did* say that. Neal Pozner wanted to do it, but at that point, First Comics still actually existed, or some version of it. But whoever was controlling things at First wasn't willing to work out a reasonable deal with Neal. So, that didn't work.

CBA: *First also reprinted the Charlton run, if I remember. Were they claiming copyright on that at that point?*

Joe: I have no idea. Probably, but you should probably talk to Ken about all that. [*laughter*] I'm certain he knows! That's what he does when it comes up, he knows how the licensing goes.

CBA: *How does it stand with Mike Mauser?*

Joe: It's the same deal.

CBA: *Mauser has seen different one-and two-parters from different companies. Do you remember any of the companies off hand?*

Joe: I know Alpha, and Chris Mills had a magazine, *Noir*, that was publishing some Mauser stories.

CBA: *Was that an overall comic anthology?*

Joe: No, it was all short stories with an occasional comic short. And Alpha did *The Detectives Collection*.

CBA: *That was an all-comics anthology?*

Joe: Yeah.

CBA: *That one, I remember. I'm not familiar with the magazine. How long did that run?*

Joe: It ran several issues, I'm not sure. Also, Apple Comics did a one-shot of *The New Crime Files of Michael Mauser*. I used Craftint all the way through that one and was very pleased with how it came out. Nick did a nice, complicated mystery script.

CBA: *Did you enjoy working on Mauser?*

Joe: I'm always happiest working on crime or detective stories (check out *Family Man* that I did for Paradox Press a few years ago to see what I mean.) And I think there's something really special about Mauser. He can be really hardnosed, like a proper P.I., and he's also sort of beat-up and

Above and below: *Joe's character designs for Scary Tales host, Countess R.H. Von Bludd. ©2001 the respective copyright holder.*

loveable. I've told Nick that I'd be perfectly happy to sit down and draw Mauser stories for the rest of my life.

CBA: *Jon Cooke remembers seeing some mythology series...?*

Joe: Oh, yeah, *The Gods of Mount Olympus.*

CBA: *Where does this fit in the timeline?*

Joe: It fits in during the great paper shortage, it was somewhere in the first... okay, it happened, I was up here in the mid-Hudson area, so it would've been '74, somewhere in there.

CBA: *Still doing work for Charlton?*

Joe: Yeah, there was a paper mill strike in Canada, or something, that created a huge shortage of paper, and I got this notice from George Wildman, I remember it very well, it said, "This is a black day. We have nothing left to print on." At that point, Johnny Achziger in Washington state contacted me. This is all before the whole direct sales market started, and I think it was the old distribution network, but we did a tabloid-size magazine about the Greek myths in comics form. Johnny Achziger published them.

CBA: *How many did he do?*

Joe: I think he did three. It died out because Charlton got back printing, the paper shortage was over, and I kept on trying to do the last issue while I was doing everything else, and couldn't do it! [laughter] The first issue I was so proud of. I didn't have anything else to do, so I put a whole lot of work into that first issue.

CBA: *Since Charlton was the first name comic book company you worked with, I thought I'd ask the traditional question of influences, if you have certain comic book writers that you cited, influences you grew up on.*

Joe: I liked the detective stuff, Lew Archer, Sam Spade and all that material. A lot of science-fiction stuff, a lot of comic strips... Chester Gould was the big influence. A couple of the incarnations of *The Phantom* were a big influence on me. A lot of strip influence, and Wayne Boring. Every once in a while, I have to sort of fight myself not to draw a certain Wayne Boring pose. And then there's Jack Cole who's loosey-goosey all over the place, and Wayne Boring, who's really stiff, so... a little bit of everything. A lot of Ditko, and certainly Gil Kane later.

CBA: *Did you like Jim Aparo's* Phantom *run?*

Joe: Oh, I loved it. I think Jim's *Phantom* was the first time I actually noticed Charlton, because it was coming out before I was working there. I was going through a lot of trouble to find his *Phantom*, and it's very much some of my favorite stuff.

CBA: *It's beautiful work. The work he did at DC then,* The Phantom Stranger, The Brave and the Bold, *and* Aquaman*—that stuff is pretty nice.*

Joe: I think the stuff Jim did at Charlton was more distinctive than what he did at DC. I always thought that at DC, somebody was leaning on him to do more work like Neal Adams. I'd like to have seen Aparo pushing his own style—the style he had at Charlton which was brilliant. I think Aparo's run on *The Phantom* was one of the all-time great runs in comics. It is painful, though, that it was printed that badly. If somebody had the licenses and the film to do a nice reprint job of that run, that's something I'd love to see.

CBA: *Did you know Pete Morisi?*

Joe: The first time I went into Charlton, Sal and George showed me different stuff that different people had done, and Pete's stuff was signed "PAM." I think it was George who said in his office, "You know, there's PAM, that's Pete Morisi," and I guess Pete's been around a long time in comics, and they said, "Well, he can't sign his whole name on anything, because he'd get in trouble," and they were being very mysterious. "Well, Pete is a New York cop, and he can't moonlight." That was the whole thing, he was a New York cop who was moonlighting.

CBA: *Mike Zeck?*

Joe: I don't really know much about Mike, just ran into him at shows, and this was later. I remember when he was showing samples at the time, and Nick was impressed with them, when Nick was still editing at Charlton.

CBA: *John Byrne?*

Joe: I saw John's stuff, and Nick picked up "Rog-2000" as a backup in *E-Man*, and then Byrne did *Space 1999*, and *Doomsday +1*, and a bunch of other stuff.

CBA: *And he did* Wheelie and the Chopper Bunch, *right?*

Joe: Yes, he did! [laughter] We alternated drawing *Wheelie*, and Joe Gill and Tom DeFalco alternated writing them.

CBA: *Did Tom start off at Charlton?*

Joe: I don't think he started off at Charlton, but he wrote a bunch of *Wheelie*'s.

CBA: *Oh, wow, did he write anything else there?*

Joe: That's all I know, because I drew a bunch of his stuff for *Wheelie*. I think it's time, the world is ready for the return of *Wheelie*.

CBA: *I should say, there's enough fans out there who remember the show [laughter] and your work and John's work [laughter] I don't know if John wants it.*

Joe: I don't know if John wants to be reminded of it! [laughter] Like I said, I got a very good return over *Wheelie*.

CBA: *Tom Sutton.*

Joe: Tom Sutton. I love Tom's stuff. He was one of the regulars with all the horror stuff, and I met Tom maybe once. He doesn't get out a lot, so he doesn't come to cons or anything, unless it's up north somewhere. There were a lot of books that were me, Tom and Ditko. Tom did absolutely one of the greatest comic book covers of all time, which was a killer teddy bear with awful fangs. He did some great covers, those painted covers, really nice stuff. I remember he did some nice inking for Gil Kane on *Conan*, it was real nice. Sometimes people would hire Tom to give atmosphere to things that didn't really have atmosphere to start with.

Below: *E-Man, Nova, and Mike Mauser were revived at First Comics in the early '80s, the company where Joe served as art director. ©2001 Joe Staton.*

CBA: *Were there any effects from Dick Giordano's departure from Charlton?*

Joe: You'd have to ask people who were actually in the office more. From what I've heard, I think Dick tried to get Charlton to be more competitive with super-heroes and stuff, but once he was gone, things went back to business as usual. You'd really have to talk to somebody who was in there and knew what was going on.

CBA: *It seems like DC just picked up . . . not only from that period, but from your period. I mean, with Don Newton, yourself, Glanzman, and even Ditko. I think Ditko ended up doing more work for DC.*

Joe: That's right, because '68, he was doing *The Hawk and the Dove*, and *Creeper*.

CBA: *But then later on, he was doing his own characters in those horror books, and Starman, and Shade, the Changing Man, Stalker with Wally Wood, I mean, all these books were DC books. He did work for Marvel, too. So what are you doing these days, Joe?*

Joe: I've been the regular artist on *Scooby-Doo* for DC's Cartoon Network line for the last three or four years. I really enjoy the challenge of *Scooby*. The Scooby crew travels the world, and I try to get the settings as close as I can, relying on a huge stack of old *National Geographics* and tracking down curious sites on the Web. I don't want some little kid to have his or her faith in *Scooby* shattered by running across conflicting information on the Discovery Channel. I also do a lot of work for DC's Special Projects division. There I answer to Marty Pasko, who wrote some of the First Comics run of *E-Man*, thereby proving that there are indeed only 48 people working in comics—they all just keep on turning up in different places. I've done things like a custom comic for Claritin, in which Robin almost succumbs to Poison Ivy's deadly pollen dust. One of my best jobs ever was a Joey Cavalieri script done in the *Superman Adventures* style to introduce all of the villains in that continuity. That went out with a Tetris *Superman* video game. It's a question of being able to produce any style on any deadline. I can do that.

One interesting thing I did for Special Projects was the art that was flash-animated for the Batman Challenge for On-Star (which I think may still be up at <*GM.com*> or through the DC site.) That was another time when the job came into DC two months late. So Marty set me and inker Rodney Ramos in an abandoned office and said, "Draw!" And we did it. I'd like to plug one thing that I'm doing strictly for fun. Chris Mills shares my liking for detective comics and I've crossed paths with him at Alpha and Tekno. Now I'm doing a Web strip for him, by the name of *Femme Noir*. Great name. I think I'm doing it just because of the name. It started out to be a female take-off on the *The Spirit*, but it now includes elements of *Dick Tracy*, the Fleischer *Superman* cartoons, Republic serials, maybe some *Mighty Mouse*. A new installment every week at <*supernaturalcrime.com*>. The site should be up around the time this issue comes out. Check it out. And that should finish it. I have now heard more about myself than I ever wanted to know.

CBA: *I think we're winding it up here. Thank you, Joe!*

[laughter]

Above: *Courtesy of Steve Morger, here's a dynamic scene from Joe's* Gods of Mount Olympus *in* Ancient Mythology *tabloid comic published by Quintessence Publications. Ye Ed still considers this his favorite Staton work! Great stuff! ©2001 the respective copyright holder.*

Inset left: *Hey, it's Joe Staton! Joe holds up one of the Tyvek stickers Charlton comics folk always handed out at comics shows in the early to mid-'70s! Ye ed's comic box still boasts a few! Photo by and courtesy of Rocco Nigro.*

Byrne's Robotics

The prolific Marvel/DC stalwart on his big break at Charlton

Conducted by Jon B. Cooke

Does John Byrne, superstar comics artist/writer really need an introduction? Well, suffice to say it didn't take long for John to attain a huge fan following for his early "Iron Fist" and X-Men work after he arrived at Marvel following his first professional tenure at Charlton comics. But if you were astute enough to follow the titles of the Derby, Connecticut publisher in the mid-'70s, you may have seen the artist's accomplished debut on such fondly-recalled books as Doomsday +1, "Rog 2000," and, yes, Wheelie and the Chopper Bunch! This interview took place via e-mail on April 14, 2000.

Inset background image: *Vignette of Wheelie (and one "scary" foe) from the John Byrne-drawn* Wheelie and the Chopper Bunch *#2. The title was John's first regular professional comics assignment. ©2001 Hanna Barbera*

Comic Book Artist: *You mentioned in an interview that your first full-length comic story was Death's-Head Knight back in the early '70s. What was that?*

John Byrne: Not sure I would actually have called it my "first full-length comic story." Death's-Head Knight was a project done for the Alberta College of Art, which I was attending at the time. The curator of the gallery had brought in a comic art show, and needed a "brochure" to be given away at the door. He asked me if I could prepare something on relatively short notice, and I did, some 20 pages, each double-width. It was a sword-&-sorcery story.

CBA: *What was your college-era series* Gay Guy? *Was it a Sunday- or daily-style strip? How long did it last?*

John: The College was located on the campus of the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT), and the SAIT newspaper was called the *Emory Weal*. On the back page they ran a truly terrible "humor" strip called *Fat Faggot*, which was wretched in every possible way. (Aside from what we would now consider the Political Incorrectness of the strip, it looked as if it had been drawn on the back of an envelope with a ball point pen.) I knew I could do better, even then, and put together my own strip, about a homosexual super-hero called Gay Guy. Also a humorous strip. (My, my, how times change, eh?) It ran about half a year, weekly, before I grew frustrated with the abysmal printing and abandoned the strip.

CBA: *Who was John Mansfield? Did he have connections at DC and Marvel?*

John: John was a Canadian fan who also happened to be in the Armed Forces. He saw the Death's-Head Knight book, and got in touch with me through the college. He offered to show my work at cons and to connect me with various people in the biz which he did. We made a grand total of one trip to New York City together, and he introduced me to Roy Thomas. The rest of his contribution was getting my stuff published in various fanzines, and connecting me with *The Monster Times*, which published my first "official" work.

CBA: *During the early '70s, were you consistently sending samples to the New York publishers? Did you seek work at Charlton, Skywald, Atlas/Seaboard, Warren?*

John: I did a lot of work for 'zines like *Chronicle*, *Epoch*, and *CPL*, but I did very little hawking of my wares to the companies directly. I sent only one thing that might have been considered a "submission," and that was a Captain America sample which I prepared at the request of Steve Englehart, who was writing Cap's book at the time, and thought it might be fun to have a Canadian artist illustrate a story he had planned, in which Cap encountered a Canadian super-hero. That connection was set up by John Mansfield. The story never happened, and in any case, the work was rejected as unready for publication.

CBA: *Who was Duffy Vohland and what happened to him?*

John: Duffy is dead. He died several years ago, of some horrible wasting disease. He was one of those peripheral people who seem to populate comics, working at the Marvel offices for several years, but never quite managing to rise beyond a certain level. He wanted to be an inker, but he never quite made it. He saw my work in *Epoch*—he was part of the Indianapolis Mafia that consisted of Roger Stern, Bob Layton, Roger Slifer and *Epoch* published Steve Mattingly—and started pushing for me to get work at Marvel. It was because of Duffy that Tony Isabella saw my work, and gave me my first official Marvel assignment.

CBA: *How do you recall the genesis of Rog-2000?*

John: I was doing a lot of spot illos for 'zines, mostly for Stern's and Layton's *CPL* (*Contemporary Pictorial Literature*). One of the doodles I sent in was a robot with his arm blown off. Layton and Stern turned this into an editorial gag illo, and, since there were several Rogers involved in *CPL* at the time, Layton named him ROG-2000. Then they asked for more drawings of the same robot. Since I had no access to a Xerox machine, I did not have a copy of the original drawing, so I recreated the character as best I could from memory. Later, Stern wrote a ROG 2000 story for *CPL*, which I illustrated. It was on the strength of this that Nick Cuti asked if I would like to do ROG for a backup feature in *E-man*, which he would write.

CBA: *What was Byrne Robotics and who helped out in Canada?*

John: Back when I was starting up I was very nervous about using uncredited assistants. I did not want the folk at Charlton knowing I was not doing all the work myself, but I also did not want the work credited as if I was. So I came up with the term "Byrne Robotics" as the credit whenever I had help on the books—such help being nothing much beyond spotting blacks. Two people helped out as "Byrne Robotics," my college chum Vic Bosson (now a successful illustrator in Canada) and his girlfriend Barb Weaver.

CBA: *Did you initially do illustrations for the text pages of various Charltons? Do you recall the work?*

John: Once I started working for Charlton, Nick and George Wildman looked for anything and everything they could find to keep my plate full. I think they guessed that Marvel or DC would scoop me up pretty fast if the Charlton work lagged (which is pretty much what happened), and they gave me a few of the text pages to illustrate more or less as time-filler. I was already working on full books for them, at the time, so those text illos were not my starting point with the company.

CBA: *How did you get the* Wheelie and the Chopper Bunch *gig? What was it about the strip you found interesting? You mentioned in*

Below: *Byrne self portrait from* Charlton Bullseye *#4. Courtesy of Bob Layton & CPL/Gang Productions. ©2001 John Byrne*

an interview that Hanna Barbera requested that you "tone down" your initial story. Do pages exist that weren't published or did you revise the original pages?

John: *Wheelie and the Chopper Bunch* is what I consider my first "full book"—entire issues with nothing but my work on the main pages. It was the most work Charlton was able to offer at the time (a short while before *Doomsday +1*), and I took it with the intended approach that, if I was going to do a book like this, then I would be the Carl Barks of *Wheelie and the Chopper Bunch*! Unfortunately, H-B thought my drawings were too "scary" (they were published unchanged in my first issues, so judge for yourself), and insisted that Charlton order me to tone it down. That kinda sucked the fun out of the book, and I became very robotic in my approach, just drawing the pictures and not really putting anything into them. I found myself unable to work that way, and quit the book to concentrate full time on *Doomsday*, which was in the offing by then.

CBA: *Any contact/memories of Joe Gill and George Wildman?*

John: I'm very grateful for the start they helped me get—especially Joe who told me I was free to rewrite as much or as little of his scripts as I wanted when I drew and lettered them. That gave me a good opportunity to practice form and content.

CBA: *Did you ever visit the Derby offices? Did you visit the bowling alley/editorial offices? Any memories to share?*

John: To this day I have not been anywhere near Derby, and it's not all that far from where I live, now!

CBA: *Recall the genesis of* Doomsday+1? *Was there any co-plotting with Joe? (Joe recalls it as a highpoint of his writing career.) Any idea what the thinking was behind the strip— (that is, was it a take-off, of sorts, on* Space: 1999*?*

John: Not sure how you might think *Doomsday +1* was a "take-off" on *1999*. They were very different books. As I understand the genesis, they simply wanted to do a post-Armageddon book, one of those barbarians-riding-giant-grasshoppers kinds of things, and as it evolved in script form it became *Doomsday +1* as we saw it. Joe Staton was originally set to draw the first issue, with me coming on with #2, but George decided that was kind of silly, and had me do *Doomsday +1* from the get-go. Joe very kindly re-wrote some of the first issue script to include some Canadian references.

CBA: Doomsday +1 *really showcased your talents and, combined with the Rog 2000 back-ups, readers started to take notice of your work. Did you start receiving mail about your work? Any memories?*

John: One of the strangest of all the reactions to my very early professional work, to me, was the number of people who said they loved it so much because I was obviously inspired by the Japanese Manga works, and Japanese animation. Which was very odd, since all I was trying to do was draw like Neal Adams, and I had seen only one Manga (which one of my College profs brought back for me from a "field trip" to Japan), and had seen none of the animation.

CBA:*What was the first con you attended as a pro? Experiences?*

That would have been Seuling con, in 1974. I had just made my first sale—to Marvel—and so qualified as a "pro" on a technicality. It was a strange experience. My first exposure to fans *en masse*. I remember thinking "This is the audience . . ?" and wondering if my future lay elsewhere. I mentioned this to John Romita, when I had the chance to chat with him at a cocktail party one of the evenings of the con, and he told me I should not worry about that, as the people who turned up at conventions, like the people who wrote letters, were not considered representative of the audience as a whole.

CBA: *Recall your page rate for interiors and covers? Could you make a living off of Charlton's rates?*

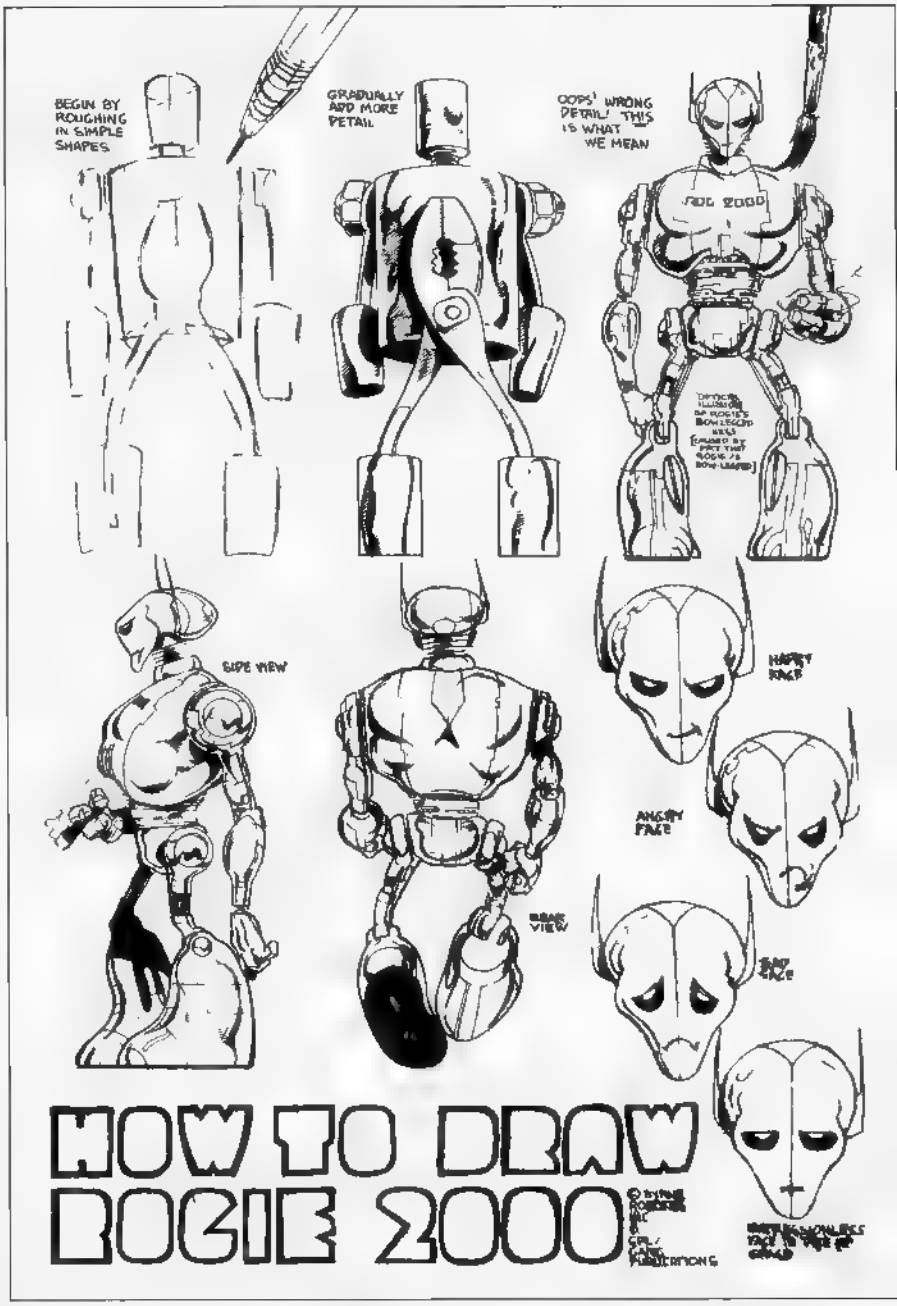
John: Answering backwards, no. After about six months I was making $50 a page for pencils, inks and lettering at Charlton, which was their top rate. This was in the days when I was also working as a designer for Hook Signs, an outdoor advertising company in Calgary, my home town. When I started getting work at Marvel, at $35 a page for pencils alone, I was able to leave Hook, and ultimately Charlton, and concentrate on comics full time.

CBA: *You were quoted as saying, "I had a lot of fun at Charlton," and said it was a great place to hone your skills for the bigger publishers. Is that so and, if yes, can you elaborate and assess your Charlton experience, now 25 years later?*

John: Charlton comics were, at that time, only a couple of steps above fanzines. They had poor printing and terrible distribution, and they allowed me to hone my craft off in a corner where very few people really noticed. (To this day, I find that my greatest curse is that the best work I do is the work I know no one is ever going to see. For years I have maintained sketchbooks specifically to this end, drawing anything and everything, never letting anyone see them—I destroy them when they are full—and hoping that the developments and growth which occur there will eventually slop over into the published work. Which it usually does.) At Charlton I got paid to mess around and experiment, and I'm very grateful to them for that opportunity. I very much doubt I would be the artist I am today, had I not had that fairly loose foundation upon which to build.

CBA: *Was there any plans to do a Rog-2000 book at Charlton—did you lobby for one? Do you own copyright on the character?*

John: We talked about a *Rog* book, and I even came up with a full-length story idea, a sequel to the sewer-monster story that was, if memory serves, the last published Rog story at Charlton. I think even laid out a cover. But Charlton was not interested, and Marvel was beckoning rather relentlessly at that point. I'm not sure anymore who owns Rog. I had a handshake from George Wildman to the effect that Rog would always be mine, but we all know what Samuel Goldwyn said about verbal agreements! In any case, it has been so long since I did anything with Rog, I would not be at all surprised if the copyright has lapsed. Pity, really.



Below: *From the original art courtesy of Nick Cuti, here a "How-To" Rog-2000 page from CPL #8 drawn by John Byrne. Rog 2000 ©2001 the respective copyright holder. By permission of Bob Layton & CPL/Gang Productions.*

E-MAN, THE ENERGY BEING FROM THE STARS, MAY WANDER THE COSMOS, BUT HE ALWAYS RETURNS TO EARTH. BUT IT'S NOT THE PURPLE MOUNTAINS' MAJESTY THAT DRAWS HIM THERE. THE MAGNETIC FORCES ARE FROM A MUCH MORE PERSONAL SOURCE.
THAT LITTLE FIASCO ON CASSIOPEIA-6 KEPT ME AWAY FOR... HOO-KNOWS HOW LONG? LORDY-DAY, HOW I MISS MY NOVA KANE!
I MISS HER SOMETHING AWFUL!
E-MAN and nova in
"COME AND GROW OLD WITH ME"
STORY--NICOLA CUTI
BASED ON AN IDEA BY--
JON COOKE
ART--JOE STATON
AT THE HOME OF NOVA KANE, NOVA SITS CALMLY AT HER COMPUTER, AWARE OF AN ELECTRICAL STORM ROILING OUTSIDE.
HE WOULD COME TO ME ON WILD NIGHTS LIKE THESE. I MISS HIM SOMETHING...
NOVA!
E-MAN! OH, NO!
HOW DID YOU FIND ME?
THROUGH YOUR E-MAIL. NOVA. WHAT'S WRONG? YOU'RE NOT HAPPY TO SEE ME?
BECAUSE I'VE AGED WHILE YOU'RE AS YOUNG AS PETER PAN!

™ and © 2000 Joe T. Staton

BUT HOW CAN THIS BE, NOVA? YOU'RE A SUPER-HERO, LIKE ME. YOU CAN'T AGE!
YEAH, I'M A SUPER-HERO, ALL RIGHT. I CAN CHANGE--
INTO A GORILLA--
OR A BULLDOZER ...
...BUT WHEN I RETURN TO NOVA, MY DNA KICKS IN AND I'M FIFTY-FIVE YEARS OLD.
I AM A BRAT OF THE EARTH. I WILL GROW OLD AND DIE. BUT YOU'RE A CHILD OF THE STARS AND WILL BE FOREVER YOUNG.
I'LL STAY HERE AND DO WHAT I CAN IN MY ALLOTTED TIME BUT YOU BELONG IN THE STELLAR FIELDS OF THE GALAXY.
NO, NOVA, I BELONG WITH YOU.
HOW DID BROWNING PUT IT--"COME AND GROW OLD WITH ME--
-- THE BEST IS YET TO BE."
YOU'RE INCREDIBLE, DARLING. I LOVE YOU SO MUCH!
I WAS JUST TESTING YOU, YOU SWEET DUM-DUM!
YOU HAVEN'T ANY SENSE OF TIME, ANGEL! YOU SEE, YOU'VE ONLY BEEN GONE FOR A WEEK!
EEE

The Art of Don Newton

D.A.R. looks at the late Arizona artist's Charlton work

by David A. Roach

The Charlton comics line of 1974 was an exciting, innovative frustratingly inconsistent group of titles. The inquisitive reader was just as likely to stumble onto strips of hacked-out banality as works of real quality but following the post-Giordano torpor of the late-60s, the company was assiduously building up a stable of interesting artists. Creators like Tom Sutton, Pat Boyette, and Sanho Kim were constantly pulling their work in interesting directions, new talent like Joe Staton, John Byrne, and Mike Zeck were edging towards the mainstream, the romance line was running gorgeous strips by José Luis Garcia Lopez Jorge Moliterni and Frank Bolle and longtime regulars such as Wayne Howard, Pete Morisi, and (of course) Steve Ditko could still surprise and delight. Charlton would soon go on to launch a black-&-white line which would boast such talents as Gray Morrow, Neal Adams, Vicente Alcazar, and Howard Chaykin, while its mainstream books were about to receive a fresh wave of Spanish talent Beyond anything else, however, what Charlton truly represented was diversity and originality (borne out of economic necessity rather than an aversion to a house style, it must be said) It is somewhat ironic then that possibly the most significant event of 1974 for the company was the arrival of an artist destined for mainstream success. Don Newton

Center inset: *Don Newton self-portrait and friend drawn to illustrate his interview in Charlton Bullseye #5. Courtesy of Bob Layton & CPL/Gang Productions The Phantom ©2001 King Features Syndicate, Inc.*

Below: *Courtesy of www.donnewton.com Webmaster Barry Keller Don Newton's lush cover painting to* The Phantom *#69 The Phantom ©2001 King Features Syndicate, Inc.*

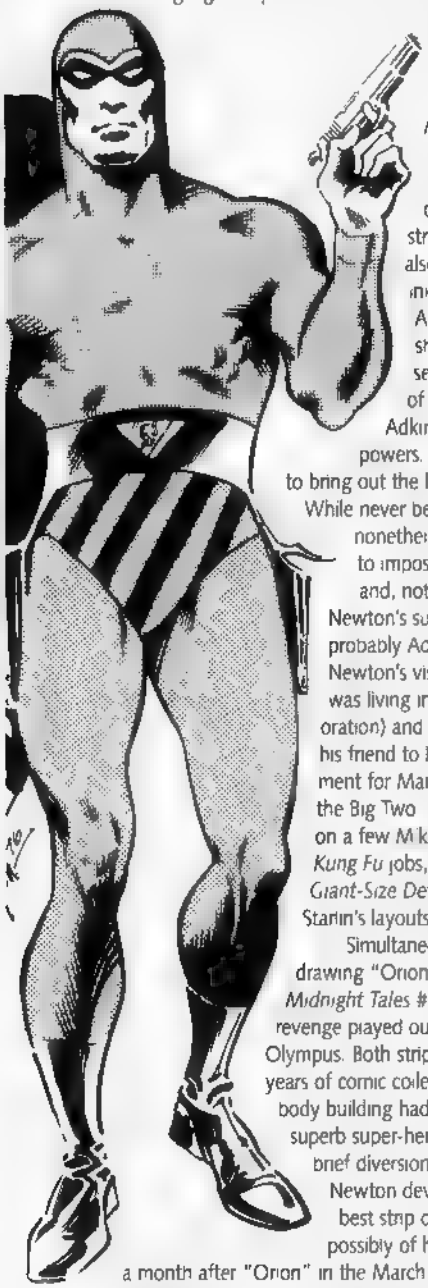
When Newton is remembered today, it is primarily as a perennial DC artist working on strips like *Batman, Aquaman,* and *Shazam!* Just as the likes of John Buscema, Jerry Ordway and Jim Aparo have been victims of their proficient productivity (too often dismissed as mere "professionals" despite their extraordinary drawing ability), so Don Newton has been too easily stereotyped as just another mainstream artist. There was far more to him than that, however Like Aparo, he came to professional comics relatively late in life. at the age of 40 in Newton's case, but like Ordway after him, he had spent many years honing his craft in a vast number of fanzines. And by the mid-'70s, his style had been fully formed

Don Newton first came to fandom's attention through the late G B Love's *Rocket's Blast and Comicollector* (or *RBCC*) magazine. In the late '60s Newton sent a few speculative samples of his work off to *RBCC* and was soon the principal artist of Love's burgeoning publishing empire, appearing in fanzines like *The Golden Age, Sword of Fantasy,* and even his own portfolio. Much of his work was painted and many of his *RBCC* covers reveal both a love of Golden Age characters and a tremendous technical facility with paint. But Newton was no mere nostalgist. There were strong echoes of Frazetta in his work and there was a kinetic, almost savage element to his illustrations which made them resolutely contemporary. There was also an element of exaggeration, an almost cartoon-like dynamism underpinning his art (much as it underpins Frazetta's) which raises his paintings from the merely "academic" or "pretty." His cover to *RBCC* #100, for instance, illustrates this clearly, his Superman is the classic, sleek simple super-hero of Joe Shuster or the Fleischer cartoons, standing heroically with hands on hips, chin manfully thrust out a typical Golden Age pose But the rendering is extremely realistic, the muscles are dynamically accurate and the lighting is dramatic, theatrical almost, reminding one of the more recent work of Steve Rude or Alex Ross

By 1974, Newton was already an experienced painter and illustrator producing a number of commissions for local clients in his hometown of Phoenix, including illustrations for *Arizona* magazine and a number of Christmas cards He was also, significantly, a father, widower, and a teacher He was by far the most proficient fan artist of his generation, but while contemporaries such as Dave Cockrum, Alan Weiss, Mike Vosburg Jim Starlin, and Rich Buckler had all become professionals Newton's reluctance to move to New York and court the major companies had held him back. As early as 1968, Newton had drawn the occasional strip (his superb "Savage Earth" feature ran in *RBCC* from #60-70), and in the early '70s, he began a concerted effort to break into professional comics. His longtime friend and champion, Howard Siegel, had a connection with Roy Thomas and urged Newton to work up some samples for Marvel The resulting Captain America strip, good though it was, did not result in any jobs from Marvel but, undeterred Newton sent it to Charlton where assistant editor Nicola Cuti finally gave him the break he needed

The March 1974 edition of *Ghost Manor* (#18) featured Newton's first professional comic strip, a seven-page Joe Gill story called "The Empty Room." In a subsequent letter to Newton Nick Cuti commended him, declaring that "the craftsmanship of the art is superb," and ended by opining that "I look forward to when you will illustrate one of my stories." The strip certainly was beautifully drawn

and composed with an accomplished sick, flowing line. But compared to the much earlier "Savage Earth," it was a curiously muted affair. Newton had yet to show the public what he could really do. Within a few weeks a second appeared, "The Treasure Seekers," in *The Many Ghosts of Dr. Graves* #45, which proved to be a more satisfying affair: full of atmosphere and oppressive shadows. The following month Nick Cuti got his wish and collaborated with Newton on the first "Baron Weirwulf's Library" strip which was featured in *Ghost Manor* #19. These were usually single-page affairs which dealt with mysterious events or legends—in much the same way as *Creepy*'s "Loathsome Lore" had a decade earlier—and was featured across the whole range of Charlton's horror books. For the rest of that year, Cuti and Newton concentrated on this series, creating eight strips in all which showcased the artist's growing confidence and revealed an almostWrightsonesque talent for muscular menace.



In January 1975, *The Many Ghosts of Dr. Graves* #49 saw a number of firsts. It featured Newton's first cover, his first full-length strip for half a year and was also the first time he had been inked by another artist, Dan Adkins. After an apprenticeship with Wally Wood and several years inking the likes of Gil Kane and Barry Smith, Adkins was at the peak of his powers. His great gift was his ability to bring out the best in the artist's pencils. While never being anonymous, he nonetheless resisted the temptation to impose his own style on the artist and, not surprisingly, of all Newton's subsequent inkers, it is probably Adkins who was truest to Newton's vision. At that time, Adkins was living in Phoenix (hence the collaboration) and he occasionally called upon his friend to help him out on an assignment for Marvel. Newton's first work for the Big Two. In addition to pinch-hitting on a few Mike Vosburg *Deadly Hands of Kung Fu* jobs, he penciled a chapter of *Giant-Size Defenders* #3 (over Jim Starlin's layouts) to wonderful effect.

Simultaneously, Newton was probably drawing "Orion," a Nick Cuti story for *Midnight Tales* #11, a tale of passion and revenge played out by the gods of Mt. Olympus. Both strips proved that Newton's years of comic collecting and a long interest in body building had produced a potentially superb super-hero artist. However these brief diversions appear, for the moment Newton devoted himself to horror. The best strip of his stay at Charlton—and possibly of his entire career—appeared a month after "Orion" in the March '75 issue of *Ghost Manor* (#22), Joe Gill's "Mr. Beazely's Ghosts." His subsequent success at DC has hidden many of Newton's greatest skills. His mastery of mood, talent for characterization, creative use of angles and chiaroscuro techniques, and his fine-lined pen work, all of which were tinglingly evident here. "Mr. Beazely's Ghosts" was far more reminiscent of Frazetta, Wrightson, and Ingels than it was of artists like John Buscema with whom he is most commonly associated and shows what a loss it was to see him abandon his own inks later on in his career, despite the sterling work of Adkins and others.

That same month also saw the first of 15 covers he was to paint for Charlton, appearing on the eighth issue of *Haunted Love*. In

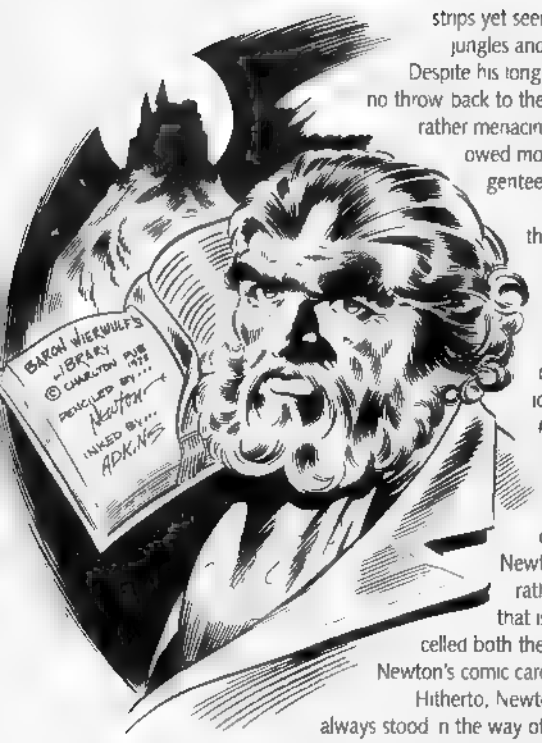
what was probably the best of his paintings for the company, he depicted a suitably Gothic scene of a man pining for his ghastly lover whose long tresses and diaphanous skirt chillingly billow in the wind next to him. Newton painted exclusively in oils and loved to play about with his palette, adding daring vibrant splashes of reds and oranges to his dark but warm, rich browns and purples. Like Frazetta he mixed N.C. Wyeth's confident, thick brush strokes with an energetic pulp sensibility and all of his paintings positively buzz with vitality. Again, it is a shame that after leaving Charlton, Newton had never again been able to find a vehicle for his painting, save for a solitary appearance in Marvel's *Unknown Worlds of Science Fiction*.

In all, Newton drew nine full-length horror stories for Charlton, but in late 1975 that came to a sudden stop when he was handed the assignment of drawing *The Phantom*, the artist's first full-length series. It's worth noting that throughout his Charlton career and right up until 1978, a year into his tenure at DC, he was still a full-time teacher. Incredibly, he would sketch out a page at school during a free period and then finish it up in the evening, and by this method could possibly average about a page a day, not that it showed. By the time he began to work on *The Phantom*, Newton was beginning to attract notice from fans of his detailed, moody work. Here he was able to exploit this talent for atmosphere and menace to the full and as a consequence the strip was to be one of the darkest super-hero

Above: *Beautiful* Phantom *page penciled and inked by Don Newton. By the time Newton went on to become a prolific DC artist his inking had become a rarity. Dan Adkins, certainly one of the best inkers in the industry, became a frequent finisher of his friend's pencilwork. The Phantom* ©2001 *King Features Syndicate*

PHANTOM PHANS!

Ye Ed had the distinct pleasure of meeting the editor and publisher of the Friends of the Phantom newsletter **Ed Rhoades**, *at a recent N.Y. show. Let me tell you, his magazine is great stuff—all devoted to The Ghost Who Walks natch, and definitely worth a look for anyone with affection for the character. Contact Ed at <rhoades@earth.sunlink.net> or write Friends of the Phantom, 465 East Main St., Catawissa, PA 17820.*



Above and right: *Baron Wierwulf, the host of* Haunted Library *character designs by originator Don Newton. ©2001 the respective copyright holder*

strips yet seen; a mixture of shadowy, oppressive jungles and somber decaying African back streets. Despite his long immersion in fandom, his Phantom was no throw back to the 1930s, instead the character was a rather menacing, almost brutish figure that seemingly owed more to Frazetta's Conan than the more genteel drawings of Sy Barry or Ray Moore.

For most fans, Newton's highpoint on the strip came with #70's cameo-laden "Mystery of the Mali Ibex," written by Bill Pearson which was as Newton put it, "The Phantom meets Humphrey Bogart, Sidney Greenstreet, and a bunch of others as they seek a fabulous golden idol in Casablanca." To my mind however #73's "The Torch" wins out artistically, if only because it gave Newton the chance to mix up more horror elements into the story. It also has a quite stunning cover as does the next issue (which saw Newton paint The Phantom of 1776 in a rather belated bicentenary tribute. Sadly that issue was to be his last as Charlton cancelled both the title and their entire comics line, leaving Newton's comic career seemingly in limbo.

Hitherto, Newton's refusal to leave Arizona had always stood in the way of a career with the major publishing houses, but Roy Thomas came to his aid and after Charlton's collapse began to send the occasional job the artist's way. In fact, Newton had been offered "The Liberty Legion" in 1975 but he had to turn it down because of his commitment to *The Phantom*. Now, however he was free to take on the odd inking assignment over artists like Don Heck and Jeff Adin which in turn gave way to more substantial work for DC. Whether it was the quality of his Charlton work, the fact that Marvel had begun using him or simply his undoubted talent, DC finally overcame their aversion to "out of towners" and, in mid-'77 Joe Orlando gave Newton a chance drawing "Aquaman." The strip, inked by the ever-present Adkins, appeared in *DC Special* #28 and began what was to be an eight-year relationship which arguably saw Newton become one of the company's top creators.

At DC, Newton was always at the mercy of his inkers, some of whom worked well with him, others sadly did not. Luckily his early work on features like *Return of the New Gods, Star Hunters* and *Aquaman* was graced with some good inks by Adkins (again), John Celardo, Bob McLeod and particularly Joe Rubinstein who quickly became Newton's favorite embellisher. Soon after leaving his teaching position, he was given the chance to work on his beloved Captain Marvel and furthermore was to follow Alan Weiss in updating the character (though the choice of Kurt Schaffenberger as inker somewhat mitigated too radical an overhaul). The book was canceled after his first issue but the feature soon resumed in *World's Finest* with Newton and Schaffenberger (and later Dave Hunt) at the helm.

Much of his time at DC was spent working on "Shazam!" and *Batman*, the latter of which he started drawing in 1979. As much as he clearly loved Captain Marvel, there was a sense that he and the strip were always pulling in different directions. His instinctively dark, menacing approach would always be at odds with such an inherently lighthearted feature. Batman was another thing altogether and was the character Newton was born to draw. As with Neal Adams and Jim Aparo before him, Newton was a natural Batman artist, his talents for atmosphere, action and characterization, coupled with a talent for square-jawed muscularity make his version the definitive one for a generation of fans. There remains a nagging sense however that we were denied the wholehearted realization of his vision for the simple reason that, again, he was never once allowed to ink his own pencils on the strip. Dan Adkins had an enviably pure, delicate handling of the brush, but on Batman was perhaps too sanitizing, while Frank Chiarmonte was simply too loose, sucking the life out of the art. On the other hand, Alfredo Alcala's inks added enormously to the mood of the feature (and with Colan and DeZuniga over at *Detective Comics*, the Batman franchise had rarely been healthier). But with such an imposingly powerful inker, inevitably Newton's personality got rather lost in the mix.

Sensing that perhaps he had fallen into a rut in the early '80s Newton began to search out new features to draw, a *Green Lantern Corps* strip here, an *Avengers* fill-in there, and a succession of short stories for *Mystery in Space, Time Warp*, and DC's horror line. In 1984, he left *Batman* to collaborate with Roy Thomas and Joe Rubinstein on *Infinity, Inc.* It was meant to be a new beginning for the artist, but after only one issue he suffered a massive heart attack and soon after died at the age of 49. While the loss to comics is clearly nothing compared to the loss to his family, nevertheless it was a desperately sad day for the medium. By the time he had left Charlton, he was already very much the finished article artistically, and his time at DC was spent subtly honing and perfecting his skills rather than making any great leaps artistically. So our sense of loss is not for what Newton might have achieved had he lived, it is clear that his style would have remained broadly the same. It is that we were denied the opportunity to revel in more of the glorious art that he produced for barely ten years as a professional.

Since his death, Newton's name has increasingly been associated with *Batman* to the exclusion of the rest of his career which is understandable but a shame. If there was one period that had best embodied both his emergence as a fully formed professional and a great individualist, it was his two years at Charlton. At DC he was a master craftsman who brought success to the company, but at Charlton he was allowed to explore and develop a unique style which briefly, wonderfully flowered before being subdued by the demands of the mainstream.

Don's memory is being kept alive these days by a superb website created by Barry Keller <*http://donnewton.com/main.htm*> which touches on all aspects of his career. Howard Siegel has donated personal letters, fanzines and artwork for the archives making this an excellent site for anyone from the curious newcomer to the committed fan.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

It is to our great regret that we could not include an interview with Don Newton in this issue of CBA. Frequent CBA contributor **Greg Huneryager** *did mail us a taped conversation with the late artist but because it was mailed to my publisher's North Carolina address (and he sensed no urgency on forwarding it to me), I received it too late to transcribe and include it in this issue. My apologies to Greg (who tells me his name translates into Greg Chickenhunter, if you speak German) and I hope he might allow us to use the talk in a future issue of CBA.*

We also received a mountain of artwork from **Barry Keller** *and* **Jay Willison** *of which we could only use a pitifully small amount.*

Finally mea culpa to **Dan Adkins** *who spoke at length about his friendship with Don but we were unable to find room for the talk in this crowded-to-the-ceiling issue. But our discussion on Tower Comics and his Warren work will definitely see print in our upcoming Tower Comics issue of CBA and The Warren Companion respectively. Thanks, Dan.*

Tor © Joe Kubert
Daredevil ©
Marvel Characters,
Inc
Dynamo, Iron
Maiden, Dynavac
© the respective
copyright holder

Alter Ego™ #8

IN APRIL:
WALLY WOOD
&
JOE KUBERT
SPOTLIGHT!

- Two glorious color covers: one by **WALLY WOOD & DAN ADKINS**, another by **JOE KUBERT!**
- **WALLY WOOD SPECIAL** with plenty of scarce art from EC, Marvel, DC, & more!
- A huge **JOE KUBERT** section, spotlighting his greatest creation, **TOR!**
- Part Three of our examination of the work of **MAC RABOY!**
- A look at **CAPTAIN MARVEL'S MANY IMITATORS!**
- **ROY THOMAS** continues the secret origin of the **ALL-STAR SQUADRON**, with art by **JERRY ORDWAY, RICH BUCKLER,** and others!
- *FCA (Fawcett Collectors of America)* section with **MARC SWAYZE, JERRY ORDWAY, PETER KRAUSE, & C.C. BECK!**
- **MICHAEL T. GILBERT** and **MR. MONSTER** dig through the Comic Vault—and more!

Edited by ROY THOMAS • 100 pages

SUBSCRIBE NOW! Four Issues in the US $20 Standard, $32 First Class
(Canada $40, Elsewhere: $44 Surface, $60 Airmail)

BACK IN PRINT IN MARCH, WITH NEW MATERIAL!

Alter Ego™ THE COMIC BOOK ARTIST COLLECTION

All characters TM & © DC Comics

ALTER EGO READERS! See the material that heralded the return of Roy Thomas' legendary comics fanzine!

- Reprinting the contents of the **ALTER EGO** flip-sides from the long out-of-print, Eisner Award-winning **COMIC BOOK ARTIST** #1-5!
- Over **30 PAGES** of **ALL-NEW FEATURES,** and a special color cover by **JOE KUBERT!**
- Rare and previously-unpublished art by **JACK KIRBY, GIL KANE, JOE KUBERT, WALLY WOOD, FRANK ROBBINS, NEAL ADAMS,** and others!
- **STEVE DITKO** on the creation of **SPIDER-MAN,** plus a rare **DITKO INTERVIEW!**
- **ROY THOMAS** on the birth of **THE INVADERS,** his work with **NEAL ADAMS** on **X-MEN** and the **KREE-SKRULL WAR,** and more!

160-page Trade Paperback • $20 US Postpaid (Canada: $22, Elsewhere: $23 Surface, $27 Airmail)

TwoMorrows. Bringing New Life To Comics Fandom.

VISA MasterCard

TwoMorrows • 1812 Park Drive • Raleigh NC 27605 USA • 919-833-8092 • FAX 919-833-8023 • e-mail twomorrow@aol.com • www.twomorrows.com

Sutton's Lovecraftian Horrors

The artist on working the graveyard shift for Charlton

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Be sure to check out The Comics Journal *#230, the February 2001 issue which includes a massive interview with Tom Sutton, clocking in at 61 pages long! And that's only the first part! Gary Groth's probing interrogation of the artist is simply a wonder to behold. The issue also contains a priceless obituary on DC publisher mogul Jack Leibowitz by Mike Catron—good show, Mr. C.!) And continuing the macabre artist's flavor-of-the-month status, we'll be continuing Tom's talk—focusing on his Warren years—in our upcoming opus, The Warren Companion, scheduled for Summer release.*

Conducted by Jon B. Cooke
Transcribed by Jon B. Knutson

Getting to know Tom Sutton is a hoot! A genuine character in comics history, Tom remains a fan of good work and is a riotously hilarious interview subject. And Tom's worked everywhere: Marvel, DC, Warren, Skywald, Eclipse, Topps, First, Fantagraphics—along the way producing a number of memorable strips, including Planet of the Apes, Star Trek, Doctor Strange, *and* Starslayer. *But perhaps his most innovative work was for a company who offered low pay, poor reproduction, and no return of artwork—Charlton comics. Tom was interviewed in two sessions by phone on April 12, 2000 and later that year on December 20.*

Comic Book Artist: *Are you from North Adams, Massachusetts originally?*

Tom Sutton: There's a hospital there, and that's where I'm from.

CBA: *[laughs] You grew up in North Adams?*

Tom: Yes, I did.

CBA: *Did you follow comics closely as a kid?*

Tom: Well, I was brought up Catholic, and each Sunday I was my household's "sacrifice" and I went down to St. Patrick's, and on the way back from church was this guy that had a little shop, which he opened on Sunday to sell newspapers. Remember the old newspapers? Big and heavy, the outside wrapped with comics, and the ink that got all over your hands! *[laughter]* The Old Man wanted the Boston paper, my mother wanted the New York paper, and so I was pretty weighed down. It was a loooong way up the hill, in the winter especially. When I'd get home, they'd divvy the papers up into their silly selections they wanted to look through, and I would open the paper up to maximum. At the time, I was the size of a *Prince Valiant* page, the whole page. You hear what I'm saying? My toes would be at the bottom, and my head would be somewhere near the top, and I was in there! I think it's too bad that the little people today can't have such an adventure.

CBA: *You mean you got so absorbed into the strip you felt you were a part of it?*

Tom: Well, that, but it was also reinforced by the fact that, particularly, it was in my world. Because it was the size of me. *[laughs]* You know? These dinky little sh*t-baggers they have today don't have any fantasy or adventure in them. That was a wonderful thing then, and I loved all the strips! I had these little kits with which you could take wax and rub them onto the Sunday funnies, reapply them to a plain sheet of paper, and you'd have a duplicate image of the strip.

CBA: *Were you into radio, too?* Inner Sanctum, Lights Out...?

Tom: Yeah, and there was a period at my other house, when I had a large collection of this stuff on 10" tape, which I used to play on and on and on and on all night long. An acquaintance from Boston was staying over, and he asked, "You know why you listen to that stuff?" I said, "No, why?" *[laughter]* "Because when you were a kid and you used to draw funny pictures on the floor, *The Lone Ranger* was always on the radio." I know how silly that sounds, but the man was absolutely right. Yeah. That really stressed melodrama in me. "The fat man stepped on the scales, weighed 400 pounds. *Fortune! Danger!*"

CBA: *Did you gravitate towards macabre stuff?*

Tom: That's interesting. I don't know. It got in there, because I outgrew the boys' stories.

CBA: *Like* Jack Armstrong, *and*

Tom: Yeah, yeah, *Skippy and His Dog*... and, started listening to these... "And open the creaking door ..." I'd be drawing away, and it was what Orson Welles called "The Theatre of the Mind." Marvelous, marvelous stuff. 900% better than any television set is ever going to be, because you're using your imagination.

CBA: *Did you also go to movie serials? Were you pretty much a typical kid in the '40s?*

Tom: Yeah, me and the gang went down to the Mohawk on Saturday morning, and we were never to be seen again. *[laughter]* They actually had to throw us out of there. These are the old theatres that were in practically every reasonably-sized, not-too-small town, complete with marquee, all the jazz you'd love to see if you're a theater buff, you know, the big posters and as you go inside, 8" x 10" stills of the action framed on the wall! That, of course, filled so much of my time.

CBA: *Did you have an interest in crime comics?* Crime Does Not Pay, Justice Traps the Guilty ... *Lev Gleason and Charlie Biro's books?*

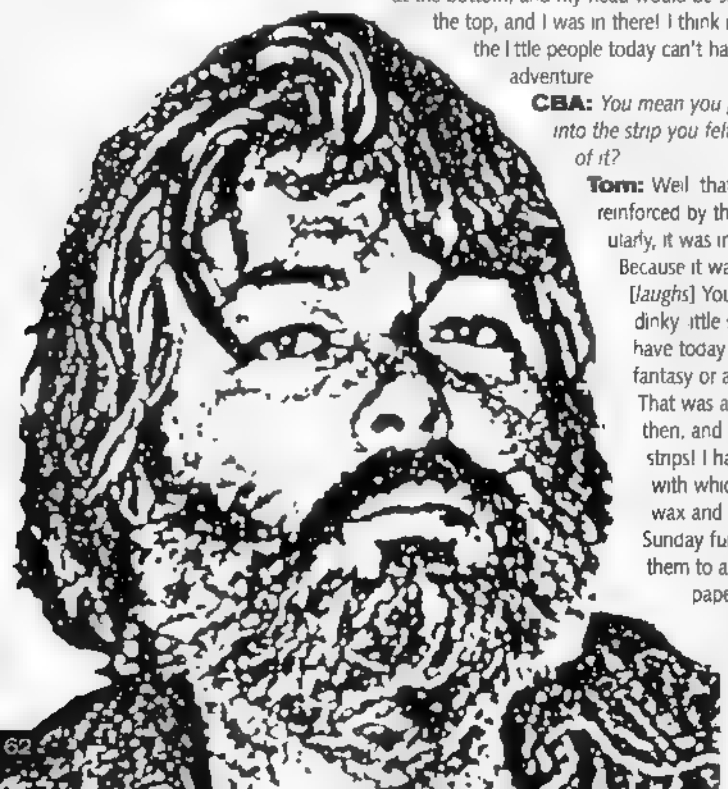
Tom: Oh, Biro... He also put out a title which had Daredevil and Scarecrow and these other boys who all lived in this shack someplace and busted crime. *[laughter]* "Yes, Mr. Hoover!" *[laughter]*

CBA: *Would you say that you were a product of the area you lived in—a very old New England town?*

Tom: I'm afraid so, in some ways... not in good ways. This was a town that never really got out of the Depression. My father had a store there, and it just managed to hang on, you know? He sold plumbing fixtures. I worked there because I had to—"Everybody in this family works!" "Okay, pop."—and my father never got out of the Depression, either. In a way, he was very good at making do. We never felt deprived, and there were a lot of folks who were, because there were a lot of mills around that town that just closed down—cotton mills. So I worked in the store and made deliveries on the truck (and that wasn't really bad, it was almost like being treated like an adult, which you really want to be treated like until you realize that you're giving up something much better!) *[laughs]* Oh, yes, garbage disposals! Well, the old man sold a lot of those! It was a good deal!

CBA: *So he sold appliances, and*

Tom: They were easy to install, we never had one of those sons of bitches in our house. *[laughter]* He did things like that—he didn't mean to harm anybody, "If you really want it, I'll sell it to you, but it's crap." *[laughter]* "And sooner or later, it's going to plug up, and you're going to have to call me." It was a great deal for the store, almost like buying a cheap television.



Below: *This is the best photo we could get out of Tom Sutton. Courtesy of the artist.*

CBA: *Did you tell me your father also was a tinkerer?*

Tom: Yes he was a consummate tinkerer [*laughter*] Later on in the service, I noticed some men have a thing about keeping their hands busy where those hands have to be working all the time I think it's a blue collar thing

CBA: *Maybe to keep one's mind off of reality?*

Tom: It could be like that He was a gunsmith which isn't exactly tinkering. [*laughter*] During the war, he built guns directly for the U S. Navy at General Electric You know, those big suckers that go way up over the forecastle? He made an awful lot of money, and hated it. After the war, he was out of there immediately! He had his hardware store back, and he had a machine shop in the basement of the house, a metal turning machine shop What he was building down there, I don't know! [*laughter*] The garage, you couldn't put the car in there because he had this goddamn huge, freaking whaleboat he was building! [*laughter*]

CBA: *Did he ever finish it?*

Tom: Oh, yes! Oh, yes And he paid no attention to what the hell anybody thought My mother would sometimes get outraged "There's a yellow car in our backyard Harry?" My father had made an excellent deal on an Auburn Speedster It took momma a while to figure out that the car in the backyard was actually something like 25 years old! Great car I guess he did fix it

CBA: *So, did you clerk over at the store?*

Tom: Yeah I wasn't very good at it, because you could imagine explaining why this toilet is better than that toilet got pretty boring [*laughter*] Harry's outlook was always "No matter what else we buy we've got to sh*t sometime." [*laughter*]

CBA: *When did you start drawing?*

Tom: Oh, I was drawing all the time Before I went to school, my father used to bring me home butcher's paper, these rolls of the white paper you wrapped submarine sandwiches in It comes off in great big rolls and you'd tear them to whatever the hell size you wanted On the floor, it was like—well, *you* have kids, so you understand they spend a great deal of time on the floor! [*laughter*] Also, a kid doesn't have that far to fall! [*laughs*]

CBA: *Did your parents encourage your drawing?*

Tom: I don't think so. They thought it was obsessive of me, I can remember overhearing Overhearing conversations, "There's a lot of that you've got to see somebody" [*laughter*] "Oh it's just a phase!" [*laughter*]

CBA: *You're still in this phase, huh?*

Tom: Yeah! [*laughter*] Yes, and I took this very seriously! By third grade, I was the school pornographer [*laughter*]

CBA: *You're still in that phase, too?* [laughs]

Tom: Yeah I really didn't need my lunch money, but why tell them? [*laughter*] That's another thing with kids Kids always think their parents have lots of money! [*laughter*] I don't know where they get these ideas Yes, and I was brought up on, "Why are you drawing these nasty pictures?" "Because people give me money for them sir"

CBA: *Did you discover the EC Comics when they first came out?*

Tom: Oh, god oh, did I ever! Wow talk about an addiction! That stuff was cocaine to me First of all, I discovered a six issue run that I still consider to be one of the finest batch of comic books around, and that was Simon & Kirby's *Boys' Ranch*. They were absolutely incredible There's something about that title, I don't know I don't have it any more, I just remember it. I don't need to own 'em any more, they're engraved in my head!

CBA: *I wonder if part of the appeal was the feral nature of Angel such a savage with the face of an angel*

Tom: Yeah yeah! He was the James Dean before there was a James Dean Of course, the *Boys' Ranch* characters were various Western types, but to me, they weren't stereotypes, and I have yet to figure out which part Mr Kirby did, and which part Mr Simon did It doesn't matter, because it was all great. And you've got a page from the Johnson-Smith Catalog on the back! [*laughter*] I wanted to send for the drinking glass, the one that has the pretty lady painted on it, and when you put the water in it, all her clothes vanished! [*laughter*] I thought that was pretty neat. I was warped, even at that

Above: *Tom's superb cover for Ghostly Haunts #38, the original of which hangs on the artist's wall. Tom mentioned that's his version of the great horror writer Howard Phillips Lovecraft—HPL to us Rhode Islanders—noting the author's lantern jaw. Tom is a huge fan of HPL and perhaps we'll entice our favorite macabre artist to do an HPL adaptation for us hmmm? Courtesy of Tom Sutton. ©2001 the respective copyright holder*

Above: *The first wave of Charlton's horror hosts. Don't ask us to name 'em as we're making a contest out of identifying all the characters on this issue's Joe Staton cover! Check out the foot notes on page three for more details. Tom drew this for Charlton Bullseye #1, illustrating an article by Roger Stern. Courtesy of Bob Layton & CPL/Gang Productions. ©2001 the respective copyright holder*

time! I think that's a fairly innocent kind of thing, of course you're curious as a kid! I mean, I would rather have that than the plastic dog vomit! [*laughter*]

CBA: *You said EC comics were like cocaine...*

Tom: Yes. I had a lot of monitoring in my house. Remember I was a single child, and everything I did would be considered intolerable today. Everything has to be checked out. [*laughs*] That's another reason I am what I am today.

CBA: *How did you get ECs into the house?*

Tom: My father thought the ECs were wonderful. No, he didn't sit down and study every panel, but he saw the gist of the thing and saw that these were books that made you think! In a rather crazed way... [*laughter*]

CBA: *How to murder your wife...* [*laughs*]

Tom: Now [*my mother*] Katherine could get very uptight about The Phantom Lady [*laughter*] and some of the other things that popped out, too. But she didn't forbid.

CBA: *Did you think at some point, "Yeah, I want to do comics"?*

Tom: I think so, but it wasn't a real aspiration. It was much later on, until I was going to art school, and people explained to me that comics were trash.

CBA: *Did you go to art school prior to going into the service? What was the chronology?*

Tom: Prior to getting into the service, I did an intense amount of work in the high school. I don't mean I went through every art program, I just didn't go to anything else! Everybody was absolutely sure I was going to fail. I was absolutely sure I was going to fail! I don't think I gave a sh*t! [*laughs*] I could not sit in a math class, as none of it made any sense to me at all, and it never would and never has. Numbers were created by aliens who hate you. [*laughter*]

CBA: *So you just obsessed with art?*

Tom: Yeah, and there was this art teacher who just gave up, and when she dismissed the class, and didn't have another class for a couple of hours, she'd say, "Oh, *you* can stay..." [*laughter*] "Whatever it is you do with those silly books." One time I came to her, after laboriously copying one of Woody's spacemen with a space helmet. Of course, these space helmets had these marvelous highlights, and it was a bitch to draw! And under that was the half-shadowing of the face. Oh yeah, kid, go pick something easy! [*laughter*] So I brought it up to the teacher and said, "Can you tell me what's wrong with this?" And she looked at it, and just casually threw it in the trash can. I'll never forget that as long as I live. "That's garbage."

CBA: *Because of the subject matter?*

Tom: Because it was a comic book. I wanted so badly to ask her, "Can *you* do it?" [*laughter*] Because I already knew the answer! [*laughs*] All right, so I did that, won a lot of prizes around town, see? I was a hot-shot artist and pornographer at an early age. I listened to the Art in America radio program, and how I was supposed to learn about art over the radio, I have no idea. [*laughter*] I got little prizes, and my parents were happy. "At least he's doing something." [*laughter*] I think my father was the least impressed. [*laughs*]

CBA: *Did you go out for scholarships?*

Tom: Oh, yes. That much did get through to me. If you were going to go anywhere out of North Adams, you'd better damn well get a scholarship. One time I did two of these correspondent art courses—by mail—one was Minneapolis Art School and I can't recall the name of the other one. Anyway, I would send in the drawings and, in return mail, I'd get back my drawing with a tracing over the top. In my case, the fellow who made the tracing over the top was Charles Schulz. Well, he had to do something when he was trying to peddle *Peanuts*. I didn't know who Schulz was until later on... Later on, I got the big, mother course, and this thing is useful to anybody of any age. That was the one Norman Rockwell was always in the back of the comics, "We're looking for people who like to draw."

CBA: *Famous Illustrators?*

Tom: Yeah. Those books are worth money! Oh, god, they're gorgeous. I never finished that. It was at that time when you never finished anything. [*laughter*] That was the end of high school, "He got through!" [*laughter*] Because they had too many at the other end, right? [*laughter*]

CBA: *They needed your seat!*

Tom: Oh, I had no illusions.

CBA: *So what were your aspirations for college?*

Tom: I didn't. I'll tell you, this is really a depressed area, and there were two groups. The C. Peastons, who were college prep students, a distinct minority, and there were the others who were going to become competent mechanics or something. Vocational, that's the term. So, I knew a number of these fellows who worked over there. I worked over there fixing cars! They didn't care what the hell you did. My friends—these were the bad boys! We all had leather jackets!

CBA: *So what were your options?*

Tom: There *weren't* any options! [*laughs*] You got out of the school with a clean record, more or less, and went and joined something, Army, Air Force, Marines, whatever. The Air Force seemed the easiest one—they didn't beat you too hard—so I thought, I had been in North Adams my whole life and it was time to go someplace. I may love my folks and all, but it's still time to go. Not that it was a great choice, but it led to some neat things... I did get to go overseas, to work on [*the U.S. military newspaper*] *Stars and Stripes*, which has two bases of operation—and still does—Paris or Tokyo. Tough duty, huh? Breaks your heart, huh? [*laughter*] I got a housing allowance, I got clothing allowance. [*laughs*] I didn't salute anybody!

CBA: *Were you immediately pegged as an artist? Or did you have to push for it?*

Tom: I had to fail, and . [*laughter*] and miserable times happened was in a.. gigantic place, like Grand Central Station with like 2,000 guys waiting to go to Korea—some had been waiting for a month—and nobody even knew if we were going by ship or by air, or what was going to happen but , definite y had talked to other guys, and I definitely did *not* want to go to Korea

CBA: *This was during the conflict? '53, '54, or was it after?*

Tom: My time in there was probably '56. Yeah I ran into two guys who worked for *Stripes*, they saw what I was doing—I had done strips at other smal bases I'd been at, anything to avoid real work! [*laughter*]

CBA: *What kind of strips?*

Tom: Oh, ... *Air Force Strike Union*. I don't know what that means! [*laughs*] I did another one which I don't recall at all, plus a whole bunch of drawings of Japanese temples and sh*t like that

CBA: *What, illustrations for articles and stuff?*

Tom: Yeah, right. Anyhow, what any illustrator would do for any newspaper. These guys came to me and said, "You know, they need you at *Stripes*. You d like *Stripes*." I didn't know what the f*ck they were talking about! [*laughter*] I said, "What do you do at *Stripes*?" "Have fun. You know what fun is, Tom?" [*laughter*] They took a bundle of my stuff and went up to *Stripes*. 150 miles away in Tokyo. I'm sorry I didn't have a great deal of appreciation of people in those days, it was a thing where I was very sure everybody was all for themselves and why the hell should they help me? But they did. The next thing I knew, I had papers that were cut—not by CINCPAC [*Commander-In-Chief Pacific*] headquarters which runs that operation in the Pacific—but papers cut in Washington ordering me to proceed directly to the Pacific *Stars and Stripes*.

CBA: *Wow!* Smooth!

Tom: That's what the colonel more or less said when he had me standing there with those papers. [*laughter*] "Think you've got friends in high places huh sergeant?" [*laughter*] If you're wise, even as young as that, you don't say anything . just study your shoe. [*laughter*] Because you know there's not a f*cking thing he can do about it! And it doesn't help to rub it in! "All right, get out of here!"

CBA: *Did you have a regular strip on* Stars and Stripes?

Tom: Yeah called "Johnny Craig."

CBA: *Like the artist?*

Tom: Like one of the original EC artists yeah.

CBA: *What was it? An adventure strip?*

Tom: Yeah.

CBA: *What would you say your style was akin to back then?*

Tom: [*laughs*] How about "terrible"? [*laughter*]

CBA: *Hey, it got you orders from Washington!* [*laughs*]

Tom: Well, yeah, I know it was funny—I came in there so young, and *Stripes* was divided in half, really... half military and half government civilians. A lot of weird sh*t was going on which later on scared me. All these guys were not what they were supposed to be. A lot of people began what they'd call the "Bureau of Misinformation." Your primary activity there was to make everything smooth. You'd see a bit of that in the Robin Williams film, *Good Morning, Vietnam*. "Everything's just great!" [*laughs*] Oh, it's so thick! Of course, they also had a radio station, the Armed Forces Network. I met some terrific guys there, some real cartoonists who taught me how to do certain things.

CBA: *Did you meet Shel Silverstein over there?*

Tom: No. I didn't. I sat at the very same table he used to occupy! [*laughs*] Oh, Shel was noted for doing a lot of crazy things, mostly to irritate the sh*t out of the officers, you know? [*laughter*] Oh, they got back at him, they sent him to Korea, to Camp 14. I went there six or seven months later and I was really scared sh*tless. We came in a large cargo aircraft.

CBA: *Were you being stationed there?*

Tom: [*laughs*] Just visiting! "Hello . bye!" [*laughter*] But that had its drawbacks, too, because there were people who weren't going to be on the next plane going back, and they didn't like you. But there were people who seemed to be perfectly happy there because they've never been able to kill so many people in one day before. And they were all there, all mixed together in the muck. We were in the Quonset hut to start some hype, and that's where Shel was supposed to be.

Above: *This perfect Edgar Allan Poe-inspired Sutton drawing appeared in the fanzine* Rocket's Blast Comicollector. *Courtesy of Mark Burbey (who interviewed Tom for the zine back in those disco days).* ©2001 Tom Sutton

CBA: *Did you have a two-year hitch?*

Tom: Oh four years.

CBA: *When you came back, did you have the G.I. Bill?*

Tom: Yeah, whatever they were calling it at that time. It was assistance to go to school, a lot of stuff, and it was very helpful. I had the greatest thing happen when I came back: I came back on the same airstrip that took off in the States—Travis Air Force Base—which is 60 miles north of San Francisco. So I got on a bus went to San Francisco, lost my uniform and I had never seen anything in my life there were just end-to-end co-eds! [*laughter*] Waving little flowers, "Take me!" "Take me!" "Me, first!" [*laughter*] It was so totally incredible, I stayed for months! [*laughter*] I used up all my parting pay right there. [*laughs*] And what beautiful people! I did do some work in San Francisco, for whatever would be hippie things maybe they were political and maybe they weren't, I didn't care. (I did learn to get paid before I handed in the work.) [*laughter*] I didn't have any money! So I went cross-country on the bus, and said hello/good-bye to the folks, and I went to Boston, to the School of the Boston Museum. [*laughs*]

CBA: *Were you majoring in illustration?*

Tom: Oh, no, it wasn't like that. This is as pompous as most of the big schools are in Boston, right? It was not where I should've been at all. Where I *should've* been was the School of Visual Arts but I didn't know. I wanted a little painting, a little graphics, and I learned that rich girls are just as much fun as poor girls.

CBA: *[laughs] So you were in school for two years?*

Tom: Two-and-a-half. I was told not to come back, but I rarely do what I'm told. [*laughter*] They didn't really care, I mean, they were really cool that way to me. If you showed up at a drawing class, and you were quiet and drew over in the corner, nobody said anything.

CBA: *Did you go straight to New York?*

Tom: No, no. I don't think I knew where New York was. [*laughter*] I remember being so goddamned hungry, freezing my ass in these places where I lived in, like eight of us would live together in one of these joints. I got sued for larceny of electricity. [*laughter*] I ran an extension cord to the next building, which was demolished anyway! [*laughter*] Anyway, I went to advertising agencies, all the places, and I was the little-guy-carrying-the-briefcase, running like mad, going to make the Big Score. I did all of these things, and did them over again, and over again... and from these men, I learned. I learn from everybody! I mean, I liked these guys, but I learned, you know what I'm saying?

CBA: *Did you get hired for jobs?*

Tom: Oh, yeah! Then, I did go to New York, because I had a friend, Laslo Kubini, whose favorite activity was jumping out of airplanes, and you have to be truly crazy to jump out of a perfectly good airplane. He's a magnificent illustrator. So, I went over to his latest place on Dean Street in Brooklyn for a while, made the rounds, and went to Marvel Comics.

CBA: *While you were getting work in Boston, did you always have your eye towards doing comics?*

Tom: Yeah.

CBA: *So what brought you over to Marvel?*

Below (indeed!): *Man, I'd pass on sharing Tom Sutton's dreams! What a modern age nightmare that somehow got past the Comics Code! Courtesy of Mark Burbey. ©2001 the respective copyright holder.*

Tom: In my addled head, at that time, Marvel was comics. I think the initial meeting with Mr. Stan lasted about 15 minutes. It was a little crazy, because when I came into his glass cubicle office, he was squatting on top of his desk! And he's yelling dialogue into this tiny Sony recorder! [*laughter*] And I had to step back, because this man leapt off the desk! [*laughter*] He had much more agility than now. "Hi! I'm Stan!" he says. "Hi, I'm not!" I says. [*laughter*]

CBA: *Did the meeting go well?*

Tom: Excellent. I think I owe it not to the fact that I was any better in draftsmanship or inking or anything than the next fellow would be, it was simply that I really had a lot of printed stuff. With some of these guys, that's what I mean, "My god, so many pages of sh*t?" [*laughter*] And, I think it was evident—at least to Stan—that I did understand panelology, the sequential art form, and that I would get better. And besides, what's he gonna lose? He tossed me a couple of Western stories—I think they were one-page scripts, if you can call such a thing a "script."

CBA: *What were they,* Rawhide Kid, *or... ?*

Tom: No, I had a real problem with those. I couldn't draw horses for sh*t! [*laughter*] Horses, oh God! [*laughs*] Of course, I swiped from anybody and everybody I could. The best from whom I swiped probably was from a man who I still admire terrifically, Everett Raymond Kinstler. I liked one of his stories; it was so obvious, because it was in there with two or three other guys. Not to put them down, but it just looked like it didn't belong there! [*laughs*] He had an inking style that came out of 1910, I mean, how many people do you know that could handle a pen like that? God! The self-confidence that you have to have. Anyway, so I got through those, and I went on to do something.

CBA: *Did you ink those yourself, too?*

Tom: I think I did, yeah. Stan was a teacher. People had their experiences with Stan—I can dig that—but to me, Stan was very good. Maybe it has to do with the way you go at it, you know, if you go into his space and say, "Hey, dude!" I think in order to do that you have to crawl on your belly and say, "O, Great One!" He was fine. He'd say, "Fix this up a little bit here, and you can white this out here." There would be all these tables, and there'd be a giant pile of Kirby pages, and I'm trying to pay attention to this man, but I'd never seen Kirby in all-pencil before.

CBA: *And they're right there! [laughs]*

Tom: Right there! Oh, my God, what miserable son of a bitch is gonna f*ck this up?! [*laughter*] And it was. Jack had inkers who were so weak. He deserved much better than he ever got.

CBA: *So, you turned in the Western jobs, was the transition to* Not Brand Ecch *right after that?*

Tom: No, there was other stuff in there. I don't remember what it was. What Stan did tell me—and he again told the truth—was, "As long as I'm here, you'll have work." That's a biggie! To me in my world, that was a biggie! [*laughs*] It happened, and when he was not there, it was... well, still had work, but it was much more difficult.

CBA: *When he was not in the office, so to speak, like when he took*

Tom: There was a time when he left Marvel.

CBA: *To work with Alan Reans on the movie stuff?*

Tom: No, no, no, this was way beyond that, when things started getting really sh*tty. Let's go back to what I did after that... I did a lot of inking, got really good at inking, and it took me forever. I inked a lot of people's stuff.

CBA: *You also went into humor,* Not Brand Ecch?

Tom: Yeah.

CBA: *Did you push to say, "I can do humor, too," or was it evident?*

Tom: Yeah. I started doing little stories and slipping them in, little stories I wrote myself.

CBA: *Right, "Tom Sutton's Mini-Monsterpieces"?*

Tom: Right, and I did "Gerald," who stayed up all night watching Fay Wray or something like that. I had fun with those! You know there were people who really didn't like those things?

CBA: *That's some of my favorite stuff you did. Real tight, really wacky, and they had a distinct Will Elder kind of feel to them, just totally insane.*

Tom: Oh, Elder was... oh, man, don't get me started! [*laughter*]

We did some of them. We had a wonderful experience, very briefly, of getting into Marie Severin's corner. Now, Marie was doing a whole bunch of Beatles—the English singing group, not the bugs.

CBA: *Right, you do the bugs. [laughs]*

Tom: I do the bugs. To meet her, someone who was practically born in the industry, I often wondered how Marie made it back in the EC days, being the only woman in that room with all crazy guys! *[laughs]* And they were all crackers, man! At Marvel she's described herself as the Marvel den mother. *[laughter]* She went right on doing her Beatle people, and, "You're going to help me with this Forbush Man thing I'm doing." "Uh huh?" I mean, Marie was very laid-back. She had it all put together by this time, and that was it! Of course, she could do caricatures, and couldn't.

CBA: *She worked over your stuff a little bit?*

Tom: Yeah. And there was one big panel, which was one of the monsters or something supposed to be leaping out at you, and I'm returning the page to her—it was done in non-repro blue pencil—it was Kirby's. The man is absolutely fantastic! He only had 11 other strips to take care of that day! *[laughs]* But he had an idea for this scoop!

CBA: *Were you surprised when he quit?*

Tom: No. I was surprised that a person of his caliber would be used the way that he was. I was beyond that, I didn't give a sh*t. I just thought it was too bad. And I have a little bit of suspicion about so many of these things, there are things that you and I just don't know. Whether anybody's 100% right or wrong, that's something else. Anyway, I did this thing, and of course it became nothing, and I can't say I was 100% happy with it. I had been over to DC. Boy, that was very strange.

CBA: *What, did you go to Joe Orlando?*

Tom: Yeah.

CBA: *Did you get any work?*

Tom: Yeah! But it was so strange! The air was different! *[laughs]*

CBA: *More repressed, or...?*

Tom: Are you kidding? Marvel was a sandbox! There were paper airplanes flying... unprovoked aggression! *Aaaaaaaaaa!* *[laughter]* DC was so quiet. It was like going to a hideously expensive law firm. *[laughter]* You know, your feet went into the pile carpet and vanished. *[laughter]* I didn't like that much at all. I think I met Bernie Wrightson there, but I'm not sure. I think Bernie was in the waiting room when I was there. But there was no Flo! No Flo Steinberg, the dust of my life! *[laughter]* You'd go in there, and stand there in front of the two suits... terrific.

CBA: *So you didn't stay long at DC?*

Tom: No, I was assigned to do this thing, and I remember as I was leaving the place, Bernie was being bitched at by some suits about his work. "It's all too scratchy! It's all too scratchy!" What story that was, I don't know. It was Joe Orlando and someone else. But these people didn't mean anything to me but a source of money. So I got reoccurring little jobs from them, all the time working at Marvel.

Above: *Tom also included this darkly humorous drawing of Poe and his cat. Courtesy of the artist. ©2001 Tom Sutton*

Well, I never worked *in* Marvel, understand? I never worked in the bullpen. I went in, delivered stuff, somebody gave me more stuff, and I was gone! I lived over in the gawdawful East Village for a while, and then finally said the hell with it. I went to Brooklyn for a while, on Dean Street, and then went back to Boston.

CBA: *During the time you did work for Marvel, you did stuff for Jim Warren, right?*

Tom: That's next. I went back to Boston and got an apartment. I was working on two drawing tables at the same time! *[laughs]* Swinging back and forth, and somebody came by with a Forrest Ackerman *Famous Monsters*. I saw it and thought, "I should get in on this, I can make a bundle!" (People are always saying that, "You can make a bundle on this one!" *[laughs]* There aren't any bundles to be made!) *[laughter]* I thought it was interesting, it was about [the film] *Metropolis*, which always fascinated me. So, I took some time and drew a dumb six-page thing about a guy who's a special effects man and invents a monster who eats him. *[laughter]*

CBA: *Did you stop working for Warren after Archie quit?*

Tom: Oh, no. I worked for them, directly for Jim, and then Bill Parente. I got to the point where I wrote my own stuff. Which is a wonderful way to work... you know why? Because you never write something you can't draw! *[laughter]*

[CBA's discussion with Tom Sutton on his Warren experiences will appear in the forthcoming book, **THE WARREN COMPANION.***]*

CBA: *You go back with Charlton a bit. When do you remember starting a relationship with that company?*

Tom: I didn't know they existed, but there's a lot of things I don't know—I'm a very provincial person. I went to New York to make

I WAS LOATHE TO PASS THROUGH THE PORTAL A SECOND TIME.
I WAS SEEING WHAT NO MAN COULD EXPERIENCE AND REMAIN SANE. I WAS AGAIN SWEPT INTO COSMIC CHAOS ON A SCALE UNIMAGINABLE, CYCLOPEAN MADNESS IN FANTASTIC PROFUSION AND THROUGH IT ALL...
IT WAS APPARENT I WAS ABOUT TO ATTAIN KNOWLEDGE OF GREAT AND FEARSOME CONSEQUENCE.
NO MATTER, I PICKED UP THE MARVELOUS CRYSTAL AND GAZED TRANSFIXED...
AT A NIGHTMARE!

Above: *Tom audacious story "Through a Glass Darkly," written and drawn by TFS, was printed entirely in black-&-white in* Ghostly Tales *#113, a color comic book! A great story with the artist/writer at the peak of his creativity ©2001 the respective copyright holder*

contact with two or three companies, and that was it! I came home, and did stuff for Marvel and Mr. Warren, and there were these people in Derby, Connecticut. I think it had something to do with the fact that Nick Cuti had been an editor at Warren, and I did know him, and that's how I got to Charlton. They published weird stuff and I have always been fascinated by weird stuff, and the weirder the better. Underground comix fascinated me, but I knew there was no way in there, it was a closed society.

CBA: *Why? Because it was a West Coast thing?*

Tom: I make these assumptions. You saw the same people—in those days—over and over again in the New Yorker, you don't try for the New Yorker. I think in the old days they really were a family at the New Yorker. But Charlton was receptive. I'm a terrible person to interview, numbers don't mean much. I can't say "Well it was 69 or 1522" or whatever it was.

CBA: *Much of your work reminds me of a humorous approach to H.P. Lovecraft. You always had ooky, creepy things going on, but with a sly wink and very good sense of humor.*

Tom: Oh, yeah. To me, HPL was a god. He was so f*cking great, no wonder he lived in the circumstances he did.

CBA: *Did you admire the man?*

Tom: Absolutely. Oh, yes. There's an image from one of the books about him (I think it was *Dreamer on the Dark Side*) in which his friend talks about HPL's alleged anti-Semitism, which rides rampant through many of those things. But it's not directed towards Jews, it's towards any non-WASP person! The outsiders, the horrors, the Red Hook in New York, these things... and here is this man, his friend for most of his life—and I can't remember what his name was, he was a Jersey Jew—and he said, "I spent millions of hours with HPL, and we had a great time, and I never heard anything like that! I would've taken umbrage had I heard it." Well, HPL was like that, a lot of it was basic fear, fear of anything that was strange, any customs that were strange to him.

CBA: *Did you read the Arkham House books?*

Tom: I read everything. Collections of his letters... have you ever seen the reproductions of penny postcards he used to send to everybody? ("Yes, Buffy, there was a time when they had penny postcards.") He'd cover the entire card, up to and under the stamp. That man really had to have his penny's worth!

CBA: *And he wrote something like 35,000 letters in his life, probably one of the most prolific correspondents of all time.*

Tom: But at what a cost! Dying at 40 is bad enough, but the time wasted!

CBA: *Right, from the work. Only one novel.*

Tom: And he had this thing fixed in his head that it was somehow degrading to admit even to himself, that he was trying to make a buck off of this. There was the story, "The Illusion of Gentry."

CBA: *I was just looking through a Charlton comic in which you wrote and one of the characters is walking through the streets muttering, "I wonder what Cthulu is doing right now?" A throw-away thing!*

Tom: [singing] "I wonder what Cthulu is doing now?"

CBA: *What led you over to Charlton?*

Tom: I was a pig in some ways, I still am. All the time I was doing Marvel, DCs, these Warrens, and the jobs were all on different art tables in my place. I would work on these things, some here, some there, over there do some of that. It'll drive other people crazy. In other words, you're doing three things at the same time. So, when Charlton showed up, there was a fourth table! [*laughter*]

CBA: *You'd do the Charlton work as a midnight job, right?*

Tom: Yeah, absolutely. The other guys, since they paid more, got me when I was more alert. [*laughter*] I do owe a certain amount to Charlton, because they allowed me to write a lot of ditties of my own, to paint a lot of horrible covers, and they never, ever, ever remarked on my technique.

CBA: *They just bought it, lock, stock and barrel?*

Tom: Yeah. George Wildman would call on the phone, and say "Tom! Can you do a weirdo by Wednesday?" "Sure enough George!" "Great. Tom! See ya!"

CBA: *Really? It was just that wide open? No scenario, no nothing? Just "a weirdo"?*

Tom: You don't have to worry about that... there were things lurking in his head. [*laughter*] Yeah, and I could experiment with techniques that just wouldn't happen with Marvel or DC. I could do things in reverse—negative things, whole black-&-white sections!

CBA: *In a color comic book?*

Tom: Yes! I kept telling people they ran out of color. [*laughter*] I was living in Mystic, Connecticut at that time, drove down to Derby—60 miles—and we kept driving around Derby, looking for the Charlton building. And all we were doing was circling the building, it was the only large building in Derby! [*laughter*] It was horrible. I think there were train tracks in the back of it. Yeah. I wondered what they needed a loading ramp for. [*laughter*] We went in, and Donna kept saying, "It's filthy. This is really filthy." [*laughter*] "Yes."

CBA: *Did you go up to the bowling alley?*

Tom: No, my one and only time I was there, I was at the block house building they had. I met with Nick, because he was my conduit to many, many things, and a very good friend. He was editor there and much more. He managed to take care of things. One of the big problems we had with Charlton—if you can believe this, you can believe anything!—they were not in the habit of returning artwork. And considering some of the material they had in some of their magazines, I can readily understand why! [*laughter*] Guys from the dirty press gang down there would prove how big their biceps were by tearing huge amounts of artwork apart. Is that something to

endear you to them?

CBA: *I have heard that story, yeah*

Tom: And you will Nick would get a lot of my stuff back to me but some stuff he couldn't get back—I don't know why, I never pestered him about. He didn't live very far from there, either. Wally Wood didn't live that far from there. Woody would do some of the goddamnedest things for them. I'll never understand why a man with Wood's enormous ability would waste time on this sh*t! [*laughs*] Hear what I'm saying? Because he was cutting corners every other way, he was using the boys he had hanging around, and the whole thing came off looking rather like a patchwork quilt, but he still wanted his artwork back. The story was that one night, I believe with the cooperation of Nick ..

Charlton did serve a purpose. They lied, [*laughs*] but they did serve a purpose, and that is they brought some people in who had never been in. Who was the fellow who drew *The Phantom* for a while? Don Newton, yes! I thought Don was one of the really terrific talents. And some others who would appear infrequently. There they are, and there would be these other people who just ground the stuff out, and we all do what we can do.

CBA: *Overwhelmingly, contributors to Charlton say it was the freedom that attracted them. It certainly wasn't the page rates.*

Tom: Oh God, no! [*laughs*]

CBA: *You didn't write all your own stuff, right?*

Tom: Oh, no. Nick wrote stories, Joe Gill wrote stories—who's on his way to a bingo match at the moment... out there somewhere.

CBA: *[laughs] Do you remember dealing with Sal Gentile at Charlton, at all?*

Tom: No, I don't remember dealing with the man. As far as I can remember, the only editor person—and I never saw him editing anything [*laughter*]—was the one who came after him, George Wildman, who drew *Popeye*. George was the most laid-back... "I sit here, and they pay me to sit here, and as long as I'm sitting here, I might as well draw *Popeye*." [*laughter*]

CBA: *"I'll gladly pay you Tuesday for a comic story today!"*

Tom: Like I said, he would say, "How's about a weirdo, about an eight-page weirdo in a couple of weeks?" "Yeah, George!" [*laughter*] "Hey, great job, see you later, catch you then, bye-bye!" That's the way it would go, it doesn't get any better than that! [*laughter*]

CBA: *And he accepted completely whatever you did?*

Tom: Yes! I never heard any complaints... on the other hand, I never heard praise. I don't think he had any interest or any real concern about what the hell I did, or anybody else! But he was there, by some royal appointment, and I'm not about to go into who was actually running that thing . he told me not to. [*laughter*] Plus, I loved that bit of just, "Do something, about ten pages." For a long time, they were in the weird books primarily, I've had the feeling that the balloon area, which is half the space allowed to draw pictures is very detrimental, because it's white space with letters in it, and it's disturbing to the eye. I said, "Hey, let's reverse all the lettering!" Somebody said, "Huh?" "Let's reverse all the lettering!" It's not much work, actually, you just take them all down—they had the world's oldest stat camera, and they photographed everything negative, and cut out the things. that was the thing, somebody had to cut them out, and paste them down, and I liked the effect! I did most of these things with a Flair pen.

CBA: *You did everything: Logo work, all the lettering.*

Tom: Heaven help me if I'd sweat; it would run, it was so damp or something, but you adjust. There was one cover where there's a guy, a really old strange guy just writing on a piece of parchment, and all around him are associates .. this is a cover I loved, I have it myself. It was done in line, and the outline art was colored... I don't know if I colored it, I probably didn't. But it's my version of Lovecraft, with that enormous ten-pound chin. [*laughter*] Remember that chin? I gave him very long hair, which HPL wouldn't like. [*laughter*] And Toad-Man was there. It goes on and on, there were many . this was really my first opportunity to do covers. we'll call them painted covers, for lack of anything else. How did I come to do this? I think it was because nobody cared. [*laughter*] The bottom line was, "Do you think the guys can reproduce it?" I said, "I doubt it, you can hardly reproduce the insides!" [*laughs*]

CBA: *I read the last interview that Pat Boyette did [in The Comics Journal]*

Tom: Oh God, did we talk about that, yeah. I love that man.

CBA: *Yeah? He discussed talking to you. He mentioned that there was some kind of color scanner that some guy in Texas had told him about, and he got them to show the people in Derby about it, and there was some scanning process that enabled Charlton to do the painted covers. For a period of time, there were a lot of painted covers, and you did a number of them, and Pat did some, and Wayne Howard did some.*

Tom: Pat's covers are something else, I love those pictures. They had this grittiness about them. He took this thing seriously, you see. Hardly anybody took Charlton seriously. Yeah, we did a lot of whimsical things, but you looked forward to this, after a day of inking the horrendous enforcer of Nick Fury's version of the UN or something. I never knew what the hell Marvel was doing, I never tried to find out, I just did it. "Why are they all hitting each other?" [*laughter*] Did you know there was actually a formula at Marvel? I heard this first-hand, right there. There had to be five to seven pages in every book of mayhem, mindless mayhem.

CBA: *Mayhem Comics Group. [laughs]*

Tom: Fact! Bash, smash! And obviously the formula worked for them. Nobody can argue that! I never had any gripes with them. I think with people who came in later, who were deadly serious about the true meaning of the Captain America missiles, I had trouble with them.

CBA: *So, during the same time you're doing all the Charlton work, you were inking Werewolf by Night and you were doing*

Tom: I would do DC stuff, largely Marvel stuff, and I'd do Warren stuff in the daytime. I always left Charlton for night, so I'd work on it until three or four o'clock in the morning—that is the time to do Lovecraftian machinations.

Above: *Mark Burbey shared with us this photo of Tom working in his studio in the 1970s*

CBA: *And it was the freedom?*

Tom: Oh, the freedom, oh. You did sometimes feel like an indentured slave. I mustn't go outside the line! [*laughter*]

CBA: *What, within the industry, or.. particularly with Charlton?*

Tom: With everybody *except* Charlton, certainly. Sometimes, it was with everybody except Charlton and Warren. Everybody has terribly funny stories—some of them not so funny—about Jimmy Warren. I never really had a problem with Jimmy, because I never took Jimmy seriously. [*laughs*] In order to have a problem, Jon, you have to take somebody seriously. He could go off the wall, he could go crazy.

CBA: *There was one thing about Charlton: They didn't pay much, did they? Was it worth the effort?*

Tom: Yes.

CBA: *What made it worth the effort? Could you have gotten more money elsewhere?*

Tom: [*laughs*] Almost anywhere! [*laughter*] What made it worth it, Jon, was that you finally got to do something that was laid back, and was fun, and you got to write stories, and the kind of material you couldn't do that kind of material for Marvel's so-called weird magazines, you certainly couldn't do it for DC's *House of Mystery*, which is one of the most banal creations I've ever seen! [*laughs*] You could do it for Warren, and you would get a little bit more money, but you had to deal with Warren and the other people in that house. But what made it was, if you start making comics when you're very young, and you really have this love affair going on, it's like your first girlfriend or something, you remember her even if you didn't get in her pants, [*laughs*] you just remember her!

CBA: *It's romance.*

Tom: You remember her forever.

Zeck in the House

Before Secret Wars & Beastly Nights, there was Charlton.

Above: *We searched high and low for a photo of Mike in his award-winning Black Bolt costume but alas all we can come up with is this Zeck contribution to* Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe. *Courtesy of Mike Zeck. ©2001 Marvel Characters, Inc.*

Below: *A recent shot of the artist at home. Courtesy of Mike Zeck.*

Conducted by Jon B. Cooke
Transcribed by Jon B. Knutson

After Walter Simonson and Stephen Bissette, Mike Zeck was the first comics artist I ever met outside of a convention. Well, almost met, as he and I share a very good friend in John R. Borkowski, horror zine illustrator extraordinaire. Mike first came to recognition in Master of Kung Fu *and, especially, via his work in* Captain America *during the early '80s, a title to which he contributed a string of memorable covers. Then came* Secret Wars, *the "Kraven's Last Hunt" story arc in* Amazing Spider-Man, *and the "Nights of the Beast" mini-series in* Batman. *My three sons are most impressed with the fact that Mike designed the black Spider-Man costume which eventually morphed into Venom. I'm most impressed with how friendly and generous the artist is to annoying magazine editors. This interview took place via phone on December 19, 2000, and was copy edited by the artist.*

Comic Book Artist: *What's your first memory of comics?*

Mike Zeck: In the early '50s, while still in Greenville Pennsylvania where I was born, I had my tonsils removed, and I actually have the memory of sitting in the hospital bed—you know, one of those beds for kids with the bars on the sides, more like a big crib *[laughs]*—but I remember the bed being covered with comic books, just laying all over. It was *Roy Rogers*, *Gene Autry*, that kind of thing, mostly Westerns piled in there. I was only four or five so I wasn't reading them, but I was already a comics fan. In other words, I don't really have any memory of *not* having comics in my life.

CBA: *Did you follow comics strips?*

Mike: Only to the extent of whatever was in the paper wherever I lived, but I was never quite into that as much as I was into comic books. The comic strips in the paper didn't offer the super hero, action, and horror stuff that I was interested in as a kid.

CBA: *Did super-heroes come early, too?*

Mike: Yeah, my family moved to South Florida in '55 and I started elementary school there. I was sitting in the back of my classes drawing super-heroes and other things. The Marvel Age hadn't quite cranked up yet, so it was basically the DC Comics characters—Superman, Batman, etc.

CBA: *Did you also make an early decision about wanting to be an artist?*

Mike: Yes. I can't remember wanting to be anything else. When I was young and asked the usual question from people, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" I always said that I wanted to draw comics. Judging from the looks that people gave me after hearing that, I may as well have said I wanted to grow up to be a bum.

CBA: *Did you realize people created these things and made a living from them?*

Mike: I always understood that someone had to sit down and draw that book. Even at a young age, I realized that these artists had to have the ability to draw anything and everything, unlike an advertising artist who maybe just had to draw a car or refrigerator or something. Therefore, they were the greatest artists in the world in my eyes, and I didn't really think about it in financial terms except to think that they must be among the highest paid people in the art field since they were the most talented.

CBA: *Did you have any early favorite artists, did you start recognizing particular styles?*

Mike: Yeah, I recognized styles pretty early on. There wasn't much in the way of credits in those days but I could easily pick out the Curt Swan *Superman* stories, Schaffenberger's *Lois Lane* work, Carmine Infantino and Gil Kane were favorites, and I was picking up all of that great Joe Kubert war art too.

CBA: *So you just didn't stick to super heroes?*

Mike: Oh no, *any* comics. The DC stuff was everywhere. Charlton wasn't as easy to find but I would pick up some of their horror and sci-fi titles when I could find them. I wasn't so much into any of the animated titles but I still remember reading a lot of *Archie*, *Katy Keene*, *Casper* and others. Those I would just borrow from friends. Any money I had for comics was going toward adventure titles.

CBA: *When you were young, did you start drawing complete stories or was it mostly doodling?*

Mike: Like most kids, I just wanted to draw my favorite hero striking my favorite pose. I did different things, I used to get muscle magazines and draw from those, putting super hero costumes on them, of course. I would trace some of my favorite panels when I was younger. I think you'd have to be my age to remember these things but when we first moved to Florida, my mother used to buy these kits to give herself a permanent at home. It had rollers, chemicals, etc., but my interest was in a small box that came with it—something like a tissue dispenser—with small rectangles of paper that were meant to be wrapped among the perm rollers. They were semi-transparent and exactly like little sheets of tracing paper. Whenever she bought a kit, I would immediately steal an amount of those that I figured she might not miss. *[laughter]* I don't know

how I arrived at that number but, anyway, I carefully chose which panels I would trace that day and got busy pretending to be a comics artist. I don't think I was very aware of continuity in elementary school. In junior high, our class was given an assignment to create a project based on any career interests that we had at that time. There was my chance to do a comics story and homework all at the same time. I was already a Steve Ditko fan long before his *Spider-Man* work. I took one of those seven- or eight-page horror stories that he did either for *Amazing Fantasy* or one of the pre-super-hero Marvels and re-drew it myself and turned that in as my project.

CBA: *Do your remember the reception from your teachers from you wanting to be a comic book artist?*

Mike: Not that much different from others when I revealed my future plans. There were two exceptions though. While in third grade, my teacher was prompted to talk with my parents because I was sitting in the back of the class and not very involved with classroom activities. My grades were perfect and I answered questions if called upon but she couldn't figure out my disinterest. Sometime after my parents told her I was only interested in comics, she came to my desk and told me that she was interested in art, too, and had taken classes herself. She proceeded to show me how to sketch the underlying structure of a head, oval, center line, guides for eyes, ears, nose, etc. I had never seen anyone do that before and it was quite a revelation. I probably spent months after that just drawing heads, [*laughter*] trying to master that structural thing. I was fortunate to have a senior high school art teacher, Mrs. Hahn, who really believed I had a future in art and pointed me to various competitions where I could earn college scholarship money. She made it much easier for me to move on to art school.

CBA: *Did you have like-minded schoolmates who were also into comic books?*

Mike: Yeah, into comic books but not necessarily into comics art. I had one friend in high school who seriously wanted to be a comics artist and we frequently got together to practice our art, but he eventually lost interest. Even in art school there wasn't a single other student interested in comics or comics art. At least one of the teachers was into comics and fantasy art so I had him to talk comics with.

CBA: *Would you characterize yourself as a loner at the time?*

Mike: No, not at all. Throughout my school years, our property bordered a trailer park and our neighborhood had a large gang of kids who were always playing sandlot sports, war, marbles... you name it. I was always out playing with other kids until my mother started hurling threats to get me inside for the night.

CBA: *What's the origin of your last name?*

Mike: Serbian. My grandparents came to the U.S. from Serbia. My father was born here shortly after. It was "Zec" in Serbia. The "k" was added here to Americanize it.

CBA: *When did you become cognizant that there was actually a comics fandom out there?*

Mike: I knew it existed. Marvel was acknowledging the fan base. Some smaller press fan and prozines were popping up. I returned to Fort Lauderdale after art school in 1970. By that time, small conventions were being held in Miami and those were my first exposure to cons. I also discovered the *Rocket's Blast* and *Comicollector* there.

CBA: *Did you know G. B. Love* [editor of RBCC]*?*

Mike: Yeah, Gordon Love and Jim Van Hise were not only publishing *RBCC* but they were active with the conventions, too. I think they ran many of the early cons that I attended.

CBA: *In high school, did you seek out any advice from comics pros about how to break in?*

Mike: No, if there were any pros living in the South Florida area, I certainly didn't know about it. Even those conventions that I mentioned didn't have pros or publishers as guests. They were just dealers and fans getting together to buy, trade, and chat... very fan-oriented, the earlier innocent version of conventions. I probably met my first pro a few years later when C.C. Beck was a guest at a Miami convention. I found out then that he was actually a Miami resident. His *Captain Marvel* work was before my time and something I hadn't discovered yet so I didn't even know who he was until I met him at the con.

CBA: *In your teens, were you a typical Marvel fan?*

Mike: Absolutely! The coming of the Marvel Age is probably what prevented me from ever abandoning comics as something too childish for me. I was a fan to the point of joining the Merry Marvel Marching Society, FOOM, buying posters, trading cards, and any other merchandise that was offered. I had enough Marvel hero T-shirts for each day of the week in high school, too.

CBA: *Looking for dates!*

Mike: [*laughter*] I'm not sure that it was so "uncool" to be a comics fan at that time. Marvel was becoming popular on college campuses, the Adam West *Batman* television series was a huge hit during my high school years... but, yeah, those T-shirts probably weren't the best way to impress chicks.

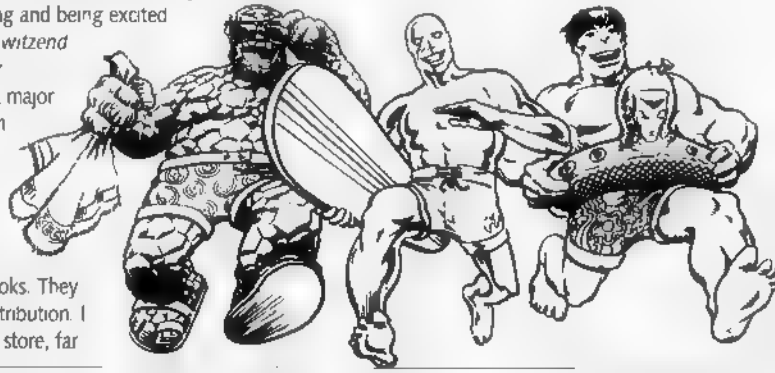
CBA: *In 1967-68 and onward, the alternative press started to kick in with Wally Wood's* witzend*, and suddenly there were a bunch of different venues for artists, not just professional outlets. Were you avidly reading the fanzines of the time?*

Mike: Some, but not a lot. I certainly remember seeing and being excited over the ad for *witzend* #1 in the Tower Comics. I was a major Wally Wood fan and had to travel far to keep up with *T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents* and the other Tower books. They had horrible distribution. I found only one store, far

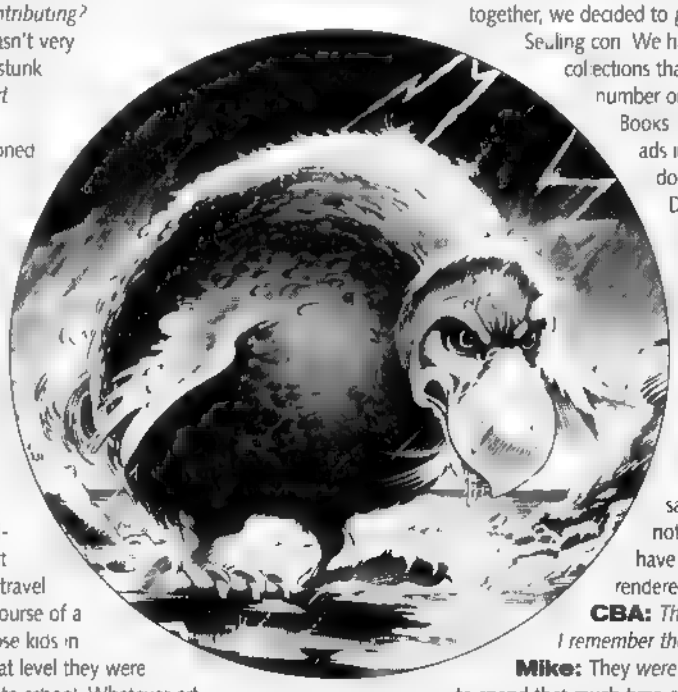
A THANK YOU TO Mike Zeck
MIKE DREW THE 3 HEROES ON OUR CONVENTION INFORMATION SIGNS, THE BADGES, AND INKED DRAWING FOR OUR COVER THIS CONVENTION THE KIRBY PROGRAM YEAR.
THINK NOTHIN' OF IT FELLAS. I WAS HAPPY TO LEND A HAND WITH MIAMI-CON 1
MIKE IS CURRENTLY DRAWING FOR THE GHOST TITLES PUBLISHED BY THE CHARLTON COMICS GROUP. LOOK FOR HIS WORK AT CHARLTON AND LOOK FOR MIKE AT THE CONVENTION THIS YEAR.

Above: *Mike is the furry one at top. Page from the MiamiCon I souvenir book, 1975. Courtesy of the artist. ©2001 Mike Zeck*

Above: *The convention badge illo that attracted the attention of Stan Lee at the same MiamiCon in 1975. Courtesy of the artist. Characters ©2001 Marvel Characters, Inc.*



Right inset: *Detail from Mike's outstanding contribution to* Witzend *#10, "The Avenging Dodo," a story written by editor and co-publisher Bill Pearson ©2001 Bill Pearson & Mike Zeck*



from my beaten path of comics outlets that carried the Tower line. I made sure to get there at least once a month so I wouldn't miss any issues. I did subscribe to *Witzend* and bought quite a few of the other zines that tended to feature pro art.

CBA: *When did you start contributing?*

Mike: Not very early on. I wasn't very confident in my art, [*laughs*] it stunk.

CBA: *Did you have formal art training?*

Mike: The art school I mentioned was Ringling School of Art in Sarasota, Florida. I took the illustration course from 1967-70. I went back to Lauderdale after art school, not exactly sure what I would do or where I would go, and within days was asked to work for a place where my sister had recently worked. It was the Migrant Education Department of the School Board of Broward County, Florida. That section was specifically set up to deal with migrant families and their children who travel from state to state during the course of a year. It was difficult to keep those kids in school and to keep up with what level they were at as they traveled from school to school. Whatever art the migrant education offices needed, I took care of, but that was just a small part of the job. I handled video and still photography, dark room work, repaired and delivered audio-visual equipment to schools and a host of other tasks. After working summers and taking night jobs to stay in college, it was a new experience to earn a paycheck and be able to spend it on myself, so I was content with that for a few years. I eventually understood that I could only go so far up the ladder in a school board job without a degree and it wasn't exactly my career goal anyway, so I set about to break into comics. A good thing about the school board job was Summers off, so I devoted one of those Summers to creating the best ten pages of sample comics art that I could come up with and mailed them off to Marvel, DC, and Charlton either didn't hear back, or I received the usual "Hey, thanks for contacting us" form letter.

CBA: *"Keep it up, true believer!"*

Mike: Yeah, right. [*laughter*] Shortly after that, I traveled to my second Phil Seuling New York Convention. So that would've been around '74, I guess. Publishers were well represented at those cons, so I hoped to be able to show my samples to some who may not have seen them.

CBA: *Previous to that, perhaps the first Phil Seuling con you went to, you had a memorable incognito appearance? What was that?*

Mike: [*laughs*] Yeah, the 1971 Seuling Con was my first and the most fun! I met a guy about a year before who became a good friend of mine, Kurt Goldzung. (If you've been following my recent work you've probably seen his credit, because he has been computer coloring much of my work . the *Damned* series from Homage and the two-part Abin Sur Green Lantern story for *Legends of the DC Universe* to name a few.) After our like interest in comics brought us together, we decided to go all out and travel to a Phil Seuling con. We had some holes in our comics collections that we wanted to fill, so stop number one was going to be Passaic Books in New Jersey (we had seen the ads in comics) to spend hundreds of dollars on some early Marvels and DCs. We had already spent at least two months working on costumes for the costume contest too. I would be Black Bolt and Kurt would be Deadman and we went to extreme lengths to get these costumes right. I think we kicked off the trend for more professional looking costumes because we ordered stretch satin so that these things would not only be skin tight but also have that sheen that Neal Adams rendered so well.

CBA: *They were outstanding costumes, I remember them.*

Mike: They were good! [*laughs*] We were crazy to spend that much time on them but if I had it all to do over again, I'd still do it. We were definite fans and it was such a great time being able to participate in the convention that way.

CBA: *Well, it paid off right?*

Mike: Yeah, we won first and second place.

CBA: *You took first?*

Mike: Yeah.

CBA: *Cool. Were you so much into character that you remained mute in costume?*

Mike: Oh, sure! [*laughter*] It was funny because even the audience was really into it. They started yelling, "Speech! Speech! Speech!" Trying to get me to talk.

CBA: *You probably were the cause of the downfall of the Commodore, because you must have opened up your mouth! [laughter] That place was decrepit by '73!*

Mike: I didn't know a good New York hotel from a bad New York hotel at that time, I just had a great trip. That was the first Seuling con for both me and Kurt and the first time we were around that many pros. It seemed like we could name anybody and they were there. You could hardly take an elevator ride without standing next to a professional. That trip remains my best fan experience.

CBA: *One of the things I vividly recall, between 1973 and '74, was how receptive and open the folks at the Charlton table were. Nick Cuti was extremely friendly to me, and I have no memory of the Marvel or DC sections, even if they had any presence. Charlton had an outreach program going on. Did you deal with Nick?*

Mike: Yeah, getting back to my second Seuling con. It was the Charlton table where I got my warmest reception, too. Those guys actually remembered receiving my samples and liking them. I met Nick Cuti, Bill Pearson and George Wildman. (I didn't realize at the time that I had basically met the entire Charlton comics staff.) And, yeah, Nick was super nice and super supportive. I think meeting the guys helped and prompted them to look for something I could do. Shortly after the con, I got an offer to do some spot illustrations for the two-page text stories that appeared in their animated titles. That was all that was available at the time.

CBA: *Do you remember what they paid for them?*

Mike: No, but I know it was low. Shortly after that I started doing some horror stories for them. They would send a script and expect me to send back print-ready art, penciled, inked and lettered. For all three disciplines, I was paid a total of $41, [*laughs*] something like $22 for pencils, $16 for inks and $3 for lettering. It was about this time that I realized that comics artists were some of the lowest paid

Below: *Imperious wrecks! A montage of panels from Mike's three-page Sub-Mariner sample story—originally intended as a portfolio piece though eventually published in RBCC. Courtesy of the artist. Art ©2001 Mike Zeck. Sub-Mariner ©2001 Marvel Characters, Inc.*

artists in the world, not highest. Even with that realization, I was happy to be doing comics for print. I was in the "biz"!

CBA: *You were looking for professional work period, you weren't looking particularly to work specifically at DC or Marvel? You knew you had to cut your chops?*

Mike: I think my real desire was to be a Marvel artist, since I was such a fan growing up. And I probably thought I was ready for Marvel at that time, but looking back, I can see that I wasn't. I was definitely lucky to get the Charlton work. I needed the training and experience and Charlton was one of the only places back then to get that training.

CBA: *So, you did a handful of horror stories for them. When you submitted work, were there changes that you could ascertain on the finished work?*

Mike: Very little, maybe a couple of times. One of the articles that *RBCC* wrote about me during my Charlton years showed a "before and after" panel from one of my stories where a pack of wolves attacked and were eating a woman and I had her feet sticking out to establish that she was there. Charlton apparently removed the feet.

CBA: *A bit too gruesome?*

Mike: They must have thought so although it was in the story and I didn't make it bloody or anything. Outside of a few minor changes like that, I was pretty much left alone.

CBA: *Did you get pencil approval or did you just send it in?*

Mike: Oh no. I just sat down and did it beginning-to-end, sent them the finished work and that was that.

CBA: *You worked on Nick's and Joe Gill's scripts.*

Mike: Yeah, and some others, too. Who wrote the script wasn't as important to me as the fact that I was getting another story to draw. I wrote one story for them, and that was only because there was a period of time where I wasn't receiving any work. I sat down and just wrote my own little vampire story, penciled, inked and lettered it, drew and colored a new cover, sent it up to them and they bought it and printed it.

CBA: *Working on your own initiative. The sample pages you showed Nick, was that of Sub-Mariner?*

Mike: Of my ten sample pages, three were Sub-Mariner. That was a sequence with a splash page and two continuity pages. I did a cover sample that featured Conan. The other six were two-page continuity sequences of horror, Western and romance. I did my best to come up with ten pages that would show an ability to draw a wide range of subjects and genres.

CBA: *Did you get advice from somebody on what to submit or did you just wing it?*

Mike: That was just me using common sense to figure out what a proper sample portfolio should contain. A sample of one genre doesn't give an editor enough information.

CBA: *Your Conan sample cover is incredibly detailed. Do you recall if RBCC asked your to do this?*

Mike: You're thinking of the one where he's chained to a column. That wasn't part of my sample portfolio, but it did become a cover for *RBCC*.

CBA: *Right. Somebody of note noticed that Conan cover you did for* RBCC?

Mike: That piece was a result of me just wanting to draw Conan and you're right, I went detail crazy on that one. Roy Thomas was an *RBCC* reader and he saw that particular cover and saw the potential to use it as a frontispiece for the *Conan* magazine. I don't remember if he called or wrote to me. I'll say "wrote" since I probably would remember getting a call from Roy Thomas. That was exciting and I thought it was my foot in the door at Marvel, but other than a few more frontispiece illustrations, I didn't get anywhere there. Charlton remained my main outlet for work during 1975 and '76. I even got Stan Lee on my side around that time! He was the guest of honor at a fairly large Miami convention. I was set up with a lot of samples of my Charlton work and had also done some illustrations for the convention: one was Sub-Mariner, Hulk and the Thing in swimwear preparing for some Miami sun and surf. Anyway, I get Stan's attention during the course of this con and show him my Charlton work. He acts all excited about the work, so I show him the convention illos, too. He swears he thought the Sub-Mariner/Hulk/Thing illo was done by Marie Severin. How flattering is that? I didn't know whether to take him seriously or not, but he declared that he was going to call the New York offices and tell them that I should be getting work, and that's exactly what he did. He was just as I pictured him to be as a fan reading all of those bullpen pages in the comics. This was a time at Marvel when there was a run of short-term editor-in-chiefs and Marv Wolfman was the current editor-in-chief. Marv wasn't very impressed with my work and since Stan wasn't really involved in assigning creative teams, he could sing my praises, but if Marv didn't like the art, I didn't get work.

CBA: *Were you actively self promoting yourself? Did you talk to Roy and say, "Could you give me a story?"*

Mike: I don't remember doing that. I wasn't a very pushy guy. The Charlton work was fairly steady and I was satisfied with that.

CBA: *Another great cover that you did for the* RBCC *was the Captain Atom piece. Was that specifically for them?*

Mike: Yes, and I was thrilled to do it. Years back when I was finding Charlton issues, finding a Ditko *Captain Atom* was like finding gold! I was always looking for Ditko's work. Whether it be *Captain Atom, Gorgo, Konga* — any Ditko story I found was bought and in my pocket in record time.

CBA: *Correct me if I'm wrong, when you came on to the Charlton scene, the brief attempt at reviving super-heroes was over, right?*

Mike: Yeah.

CBA: *Did you regret that? Did you wish you had a chance to do your own hero over there?*

Below: *Mike's extraordinarily detailed Conan illustration, used as the cover for RBCC #109, 1974. Marvel editor-in-chief Roy Thomas was impressed enough by the work that he asked Mike to reprint it in a Savage Sword of Conan. Mike proceeded to draw a few frontispieces for Marvel in the mid '70s before the work dried up. Courtesy of the artist. Conan ©2001 Conan Properties. Art ©2001 Mike Zeck*

BELOW IS MONTIGUE MANOR AND PORTRAITS OF THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS OF THE STORY. USE THIS AND THE FACING PAGE AS REFERENCES. DON'T PEEK AT THE LAST PAGE UNTIL YOU ARE CERTAIN THAT YOU HAVE SOLVED THE MYSTERY OF .....
THE HOUR OF THE WEREWOLF
CLORIS MONTIGUE: FAVORITE NIECE OF THE LATE WALTER MONTIGUE. [redacted] EARNS HER LIVING AS A FASHION DESIGNER.
DR. ROGER MONTIGUE: A DENTIST AND CLORIS' COUSIN.
BOB COURTNEY: GAMEKEEPER FOR THE MONTIGUE ESTATE.
FRED LASLOW: THE FAMILY LAWYER.
CHIN LEE: WALTER MONTIGUE'S ADOPTED DAUGHTER
MR. AND MRS. BASS: FAITHFUL SERVANTS.
EDITOR Gerr Wildman
WRITER: Nick Cuti
ARTIST M.T. Zuck

Above: *Mike seized the opportunity to draw an entire Charlton mystery book, a rare occasion, and really went all-out for his full-length story, "The Hour of the Werewolf," featuring the ol' monster hunter himself, Colonel White-Shroud From* Monster Hunter #9 *Courtesy of the artist ©2001 the respective copyright holder*

Mike: No, I didn't feel that at the time. I was happy to have the work. I was a fan of horror, too, and probably had as much fun with that as any hero

CBA: *In* Monster Hunters #9, *you did a complete book?*

Mike: That was my first full-length book

CBA: *Was that planned beforehand? That is, "Hey, Mike, do you want to do a full book?" It was pretty rare for the mystery/horror comics to do full-length stories*

Mike: I don't think it was planned with me in mind Unless, maybe Nick had me in mind when he was writing it

CBA: *When you came up to New York, to the Seuling con, did you make it over to Derby?*

Mike: think it was sometime after that convention trip but I did visit Derby prior to making a move north. In 1976, I think. I stayed with Nick, got a tour of Charlton, and discovered the "everything under one roof" concept of comics publishing That was pretty amazing to be able to walk in the front door where the executive offices were, pass through editorial, enter the printing and binding area and end up at the docks at the rear end of the building where the distribution trucks were loaded The comics offices were separate from the main Charlton building. They had quite a bit of space and must have housed quite a few people at one time, but now that the comics were winding down, it was just George Wildman Bill Pearson and Helen who did color separations. I think Nick had already left to freelance at that point. Just those few people and a bunch of empty drawing tables. I remember George was drawing *Popeye* at the time The following year, '77, I decided to make the move North and see if I could get something steady from Marvel or DC. Charlton wasn't buying new material anymore and I figured being local would give me a better chance with the "Big Two."

CBA: *Was the move a total risk, or did you have some assignments in hand that gave you the confidence to say, "Yeah, I'm going to be able to break in"?*

Mike: Archie Goodwin had minimized the risk, somewhat. I guess I got a bit more pushy when the Charlton work dried up and actually made some calls to Marvel. Archie gave me a five-page tryout story that featured the Destroyer and was published in *Logan's Run* #6 my first color comics work at Marvel Marvel was having deadline problems with Jim Craig on the *Master of Kung Fu* book around that same time. So some weeks after my tryout story, good ol' Archie calls me and is apologizing for calling because they're in a bind with the *Kung Fu* book and they need a 22-page fill-in issue penciled in a week. It was a weird call because he was offering a job, but at the same time trying to talk me out of it. [*laughter*] I told him to to send the plot! "I'll do it, and it'll be done in a week!" I did it, I was seriously sleep deprived, it wasn't very good, but I didn't want to pass up a chance to stick my foot in Marvel's door again

CBA: *Who inked it?*

Mike: Jim Mooney At least they gave the pencils to a seasoned veteran, but if they gave me a week to pencil it, I wonder how many hours they gave poor Jim to ink it?

CBA: *Was that the first work you ever submitted that was inked by someone else?*

Mike: You know, I guess it is! [*laughs*] I hadn't really thought of that

CBA: *Do you have a preference about you doing your own inking?*

Mike: Not particularly. I thought of myself more as a penciler than an inker I was aware of the assembly line method of producing comics so I wasn't horrified to think that I was going to pencil something that someone else would ink

CBA: *Looking at your Charlton work, you were obviously talented, but perhaps needed some development. But your stories in* witzend, *with all the wash, are startling. It seems to me an incredible leap*

Mike: agree. Throughout a creative career, you can experience those leaps and I do consider the Dodo story to be one it was for *witzend*, a magazine that Wally Wood started and one that I had faithfully subscribed to from it's inception. That may have been more pressure than even my sample portfolio [*laughs*] Bill Pearson was handling *witzend* then He liked what I was sending in to the Charlton offices and asked if he wrote a story for *witzend*, would I draw it? "Hell, yeah!" No need to ask twice!

CBA: *I would assume you spent more time per page on that* witzend *story than your other pro work?*

Mike: Definitely

CBA: *How did you develop the wash technique?*

Mike: I had already heard about Dr Martin's colored inks and I was using those for my color covers at Charlton I guess I was developing some modeling technique with those. I used a slate gray Dr Martin's ink to create the wash for the Dodo story and it turned out pretty well, but Bill pointed out my mistake when he saw the originals. The gray was a blueish, cool gray and would be tough to reproduce I hadn't considered that. Bill was great though and took extra care with the printing to make sure that the printed version was faithful to the original

CBA: *Were you happy with the results?*

Mike: Extremely happy with the results and extremely happy to be printed in *witzend*. Not to slight Charlton, [*laughs*] but it was more exciting to pick up *witzend* and see my work printed in it than it was to pick up *Scary Tales* and see my work printed inside

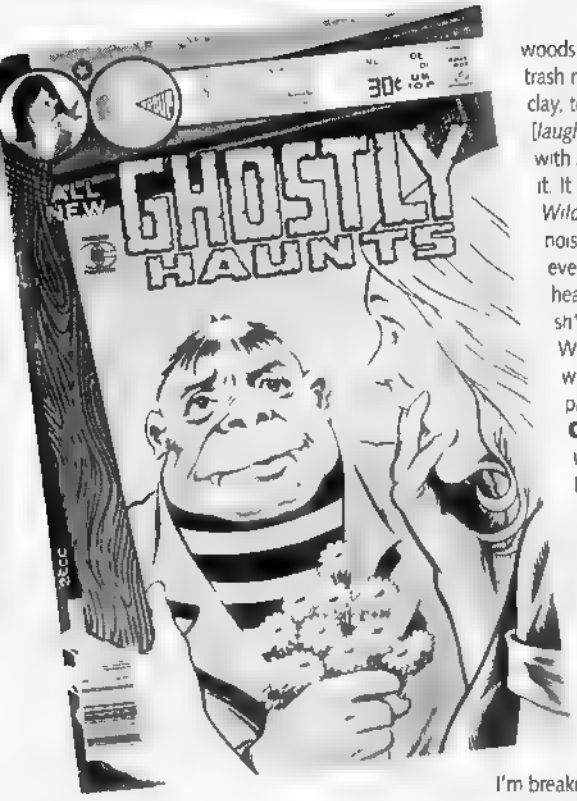
CBA: *Then did you get much feedback when the story was printed? Did people stand up and take notice?*

Mike: Well, Bill did! [*laughter*] He was real pleased with it. I don't remember hearing much from other corners of the comics world

CBA: *What's Bill Pearson like?*

Mike: An intelligent and talented guy! We hung out a lot while he was still in Connecticut... lunches, dinners, pay-per-view boxing, working on *witzend*, etc. He's been out in Arizona for years now. We manage to still stay in contact via the occasional phone call or E-mail.
CBA: *Were you dealing with Bill on the phone at Charlton?*
Mike: Mostly him and Nick. I don't remember any of the guys telling me that Charlton had ceased buying new art. I think I had to be without work for a little while before I understood that. [*laughs*]
CBA: *You made the move to Connecticut after the work dried up from Charlton. So, it's just a question of being close to New York?*
Mike: I wanted to be local, but I didn't particularly want to live in New York City for various reasons... finances mostly. It was just a question of the New Jersey side of New York or the Connecticut side so I moved right to Derby since that was the only place in the North where I knew people. Jim Craig continued to miss deadlines on the *Kung Fu* book and I had become something of a regular fill-in artist for the book, so I was feeling better about keeping my foot in Marvel's door this time. Bill invited me to come over to work at the Charlton office any time I wanted to, since there was so much unused space. I did take my work over there quite often and work on some pages while George and Bill put together some reprint material. When they needed some art corrections, they could always talk me into doing that so maybe there was a method to their invitation.
CBA: *Art corrections for free!* [laughter]
Mike: Yeah, but I enjoyed the studio aspect of it and having some lunch partners.
CBA: *Was it a happy place?*
Mike: As happy as it could be, I guess. We all got along well. I wasn't counting on Charlton for work any more and those guys probably had it in their minds that this was going to end at some point. It wasn't spoken or anything, but when you're in that big of a place and only taking up a few desks...
CBA: *The writing's on the wall.*
Mike: Yeah. [*laughs*]
CBA: *Did you visit Wally Wood when you were there?*
Mike: I didn't even realize that Wally Wood lived right in Derby when I moved there, but I soon found out. I was introduced to Woody shortly after arriving in Connecticut and attended his wedding. He was about 50 then and he was marrying his third wife. Right away I got an invitation to visit his studio [*laughs*] so I guess he saw a potential assistant in me. The first time I went over to work in his studio, he was working on... I probably won't get this name right... a portfolio titled something like *Wally Wood's Weird Sex Fantasy Portfolio*. I forget the publisher but it was some red-jacketed portfolio with a gold-embossed cover. I was somewhat shocked that one of my "art gods" was looking for assistants to help him complete a portfolio of his work. That was before I learned of Woody's long history of assistants. I showed up on a winter night at Woody's studio which was a small structure separate from his main house. Paul Kirchner was there, too. Paul lived in that general area and had helped Woody on many projects. We all shed our jackets to begin work and I notice that Woody and Paul were both wearing shoulder holsters and guns [*laughter*] like some kind of private detective office or something. I didn't know if we were in a high crime neighborhood or what, but I suddenly felt naked [*laughs*]. I learned that Woody was quite the gun nut and Paul was very interested in guns, too. That was just part of the regular studio garb at Woody's place. You're drawing and packing at the same time. After working there a few evenings, Woody was pleased with my work and had come up behind me to check out my progress, I figured. What I didn't know was that he had another gun in his hand and he just squeezed off a round right behind me. It was just fortunate I didn't have a full brush of ink in my hand! [*laughter*] I turn around and Woody has this silly elfin grin on his face and he just hands me the gun without saying a word. I take a few seconds to get the feel of it and then pop off a round into the floor. Woody just says, "You want it? It's yours."
CBA: *Your rite of passage, right?* [laughter]
Mike: Right. So Woody digs around in the studio and brings me the leather shoulder holster for my new gun and two other small leather holsters, one to strap around my ankle if I want to wear it beneath my pants leg, and another to clip on the waist of my pants if I want to wear it on my back beneath a jacket. Plus, he gave me a speed loader, a small locking chamber that allows you to fully load your empty gun chamber in one motion. The complete Woody Assistant Kit! [*laughter*] So the next night I show up for work, shed my jacket, I'm packing of course, and all was well in the studio.
CBA: *Private eye-slash-comic book artist!* [laughter] *The obvious question is, was there a lot of crime in Derby?* [laughter]
Mike: I felt quite sure that Paul and Woody weren't going to be robbed. Packing heat while working just made it easier to take a break and go out and shoot some cans or bottles whenever we felt like it. Woody much preferred doing that over drawing. The happiest I ever saw Woody was during one of those occasions. Gray Morrow was in town. A bullet trap was being exchanged but I don't remember if he was bringing one to Woody or Woody had one for him. (A bullet trap is a steel box with a front opening to hang a target. An angled back deflects the bullet downward into a sand pit. Made for those times when you feel like shooting, but just don't feel like going outdoors.) Gray was an apparent gun fan, too, so in honor of this visit, Woody, Gray, Paul, Nick Cuti, and I all went out to a wooded area to shoot some guns. We had shotguns, automatic weapons, you name it. We probably could've started a small war. We made an ammo stop first and only a type of red-tipped, exploding bullet was good enough for Woody. They were expensive, but they were destructive, so well worth it!? There was a good sized hill in the

Above: *Another page from* Monster Hunter *#9's full-length Cuti/Zeck tale. Mike tells us that while art was regularly shredded at the company, he was able to spirit out some of his work while living near the Derby plant. Courtesy of the artist. ©2001 the respective copyright holder.*



Above *You call this a horror comic? An atypically cute Zeck cover for Charlton's* Ghostly Haunts *#53. ©2007 the respective copyright holder*

woods and a pile of cans, bottles and other trash near it. Woody liked to bring modeling clay, too, because it "blew up real good." [*laughs*] We just lined up in front of the trash with all of that armament and opened up on it. It wasn't target practice, it was more of a *Wild Bunch* thing. You wouldn't believe the noise, the smoke, and the debris flying everywhere, including back at us. I turn my head to avoid debris and I see the biggest sh*t-eating grin I've ever seen on Woody's face. I never saw him smile when he was nailing a perfect comics panel, but he was absolutely loving this.

CBA: *How long did you assist Woody?*

Mike: I helped him as much as I could before he left Connecticut. I guess about a year. He didn't really want to work, so he was only taking on what he had to. His health was really bad. His alcoholism had taken it's toll. There were times he had to be taken to the hospital, but as soon as he regained enough strength to get on his feet, he would call me and say "Bring me some pants and a shirt, I'm breaking out of here." I don't know if they took his clothes or why he didn't have his own pants, but I would go to the hospital, find his room, give him something to wear, and we'd leave without anyone knowing. [*laughter*]

CBA: *Is there a picture of you at Woody's?*

Mike: I don't think so. Lots of pictures were taken, but I was behind the camera. Woody wanted to publish a big Wally Wood book and even include a record of him singing and playing his guitar, a country-Western recording. He wanted me to create the record sleeve cover, so I spent a day taking pictures of him outdoors (walking the railroad tracks, sitting on junked cars, etc.) and indoors (some dark shots with just a single light partially illuminating Woody's face and his cigarette smoke swirling in the blackness). The book and record never materialized. Some of the pictures were used in other publications about Wood. Sadly, I don't even know where those negatives are today.

CBA: *After you stopped assisting him, did you maintain contact?*

Mike: No, but I sort of kept up with what he was doing, first in upper-state New York and later in California where he was trying to draw another issue of *Bang* for it's publisher. I had helped him with an earlier issue of *Bang* while he was still in Connecticut. I think it was Bill Pearson who called me to let me know that Woody had shot himself while in California. After one of our escapes from the Connecticut hospital, Woody would immediately thumb his nose at the doctor's advice and have me stop for cigarettes. I questioned him about his health and what the doctors were saying. Even then the doctors were letting him know that his kidneys were shot and he would have to go on dialysis. Woody wasn't having any of that! He actually sat in my car and told me that he would put a gun to his head before he'd go on dialysis. I believed he was serious, but I couldn't really find any words that might have convinced him otherwise. I knew him well enough to know that being a slave to dialysis would be a fate worse than death for him. He shot himself just before he was scheduled to begin dialysis in California.

CBA: *So you weren't surprised?*

Mike: No. He chose to sidestep the suffering portion of the end of his life and I don't blame him for that. He had the guts to leave on his own terms and he remained "in character" until the end.

CBA: *Wally Wood was one of the most highly-regarded comic artists at the time, and he struggled to get by to the very end, getting work and ranting about publishers. Did you learn any lessons from that?*

Mike: Not as many as I should have! [*laughter*] I saw it in more of the older artists than just Woody. No one was making enough money to create a nest egg, no one had insurance coverage... you basically sat at your drawing board hoping to get enough assignments to get by until you finally lay your head down on your board and expire. That's the life of a comics artist!

CBA: *Do you still see that? [laughs]*

Mike: Sure! Things improved for artists during the late-'70s and '80s, but now the decline of the industry has put comics artists back in that same position again. I feel like I was born at just the right time, to be a comics fan turned pro. Growing up on the DC Silver Age comics and being there at the beginning of the Marvel explosion and growth of fandom was fan heaven. I doubt if there will ever be another period like that. I broke into the industry at the right time, too. Sales were healthy, a royalty plan was adopted, and I was working on some high profile series. Who knows if comics will see sales figures like that again? I've never been one of those artist types who just must be creating to be fulfilled. I'm just the opposite. When those royalty checks arrived, that just meant I could start partying and globe-hopping instead of working... definitely took advantage of the gravy days and I'm happy I was there to enjoy them but I probably should have learned a bit more from those who came before me.

CBA: *What was the best aspect of working for Charlton?*

Mike: Probably the freedom. "We need a story to print, here's a script, have fun with it, get it back to us ready to print and on time and you're fine." I didn't have anything to compare it to at the time, but once I moved on, I realized it was rare to have that amount of freedom.

CBA: *What was the worst aspect of working for Charlton?*

Mike: No negatives at all, to tell you the truth.

CBA: *Not even the money?*

Mike: That's the only thing I might point to, but the fact that they were the first to give me assignments and allow me to train while working more than made up for the meager pay.

CBA: *What was you favorite piece you did for Charlton?*

Mike: Probably the full issue of *Monster Hunters*. Doing a full-length story upped the pressure and the inspiration, too, I suppose. That and some of those full-color covers. I always had fun with those.

CBA: *Were you unhappy not to receive your original art back?*

Mike: The story went around Charlton that in the early days, much of the original art was getting shredded. I'm not sure if that's true or not. When I arrived in Connecticut, the back section of the comics office had stacks of gray envelopes containing pages of many of the recently published books. Much of that was being used to assemble the reprint books. My being there, gave me the opportunity to go back there to find and rescue most of my original pages.

CBA: *Did you meet other Charlton artists? Wayne Howard?*

Mike: I think I met Wayne Howard very briefly through Woody. I got to know Dick Giordano and Frank Mclaughlin since they had studios in Connecticut. I spent some time with Joe Gill when I first came up, too. While I was in Florida, I was a frequent visitor to Casinos in the Bahamas, Jai Alai frontons, and poker tables. Joe Gill introduced me to some Connecticut style poker and Jai Alai.

CBA: *Do you ever talk to Joe Gill anymore?*

Mike: I haven't spoken to Joe in years. I'll always have great memories of George, Nick and Bill and that time period in general. Unfortunately, outside of Bill Pearson, I have very little contact with any of the old Charlton crew.

Below: *A recent photo of Mike and Angel Zeck relaxing in their Connecticut abode. Courtesy of the artist*

TOTEC
A COMIC BOOK BY
ARMANDO CARRILLO
...SCIENCE FICTION
CAPTAIN COSMOS
VIDEO AND AUDIO ADVENTURES
SPACESHIP MODELS
COMICS
BY NICOLA CUTI & JOE STATON

Jack Keller on Wheels

The hot rod cartoonist on life in Charlton's fastlane

Conducted by Jon B. Cooke
Transcribed by Jon B. Knutson

What did I know of Jack Keller when someone gave me his contact information? Well, not much: I only knew him to be a hot rod comic book artist who drew a gazillion Charlton grease monkey stories (and some material for DC's Hot Wheels, let's not forget!) and zillions more Kid Cowl, Outlaw tales for Atlas/Marvel in the 1950s and '60s. Well, prepare for an education as Jack's career stretches back a ways! This delightful telephone interview was conducted on January 8, 2001, and the artist copy edited the final transcript.

Comic Book Artist: *Jack, I did my best to research as much as possible, but there's not much written in the historical record on you. Yet your's is a name that I've always seen around, in millions of Marvel Westerns, and virtually every single hot rod comic that Charlton put out.*

Jack Keller: Well, I was kind of a loner. I never associated that much with other artists. The only one in my area was Jim Steranko, and he didn't come along until later years. In fact, he was just about getting into the business as I was getting out.

CBA: *Where are you from originally?*

Jack: I was born in Reading, Pennsylvania on June 16, 1922.

CBA: *Did you discover comics in your childhood?*

Jack: [*laughs*] Well, I'll tell you, I wanted to be a comic artist before comic books were even around! Since I was a little kid—before I went to school—I used to copy the cartoons from the newspaper, and my dad used to help me with my drawing.

CBA: *Were you into the adventure strips?*

Jack: When I graduated from high school in 1940, I think the strip I was most interested in was *Terry and the Pirates*. Also, I liked Alex Raymond's stuff, too, I thought *Flash Gordon* was great stuff and, of course, the great Hal Foster.

CBA: *So at an early age, you had a decision that you wanted to be a cartoonist?*

Jack: Very early! [*laughter*]

CBA: *When did you realize that, "Yes, as a matter of fact, I can have a career at this."*

Jack: When I got out of high school, I tried to get help, and no one in this area knew a darn thing about it. They didn't know anything, didn't know where you could get a job, or where you could go to school, or anything like that. There was just no help at all. So, what I did was, I created a comic strip in 1941 called "The Whistler," and I mailed it to Dell Comics. I wrote the story and illustrated it. It ran for one issue, but it did get me a start! [*laughs*] As crude as it was, it still was the first effort. I was lucky to sell the first thing I ever did! [*laughter*] And then, in '42, I sent some work in to Quality Comics in New York City, and they hired me to work on the backgrounds for Lou Fine on *The Spirit*. That was a supplementary book they had in the newspapers at that time . . . don't know if you're familiar with it or not.

CBA: *Oh, quite, yes! It's a landmark strip!*

Jack: I would think so.

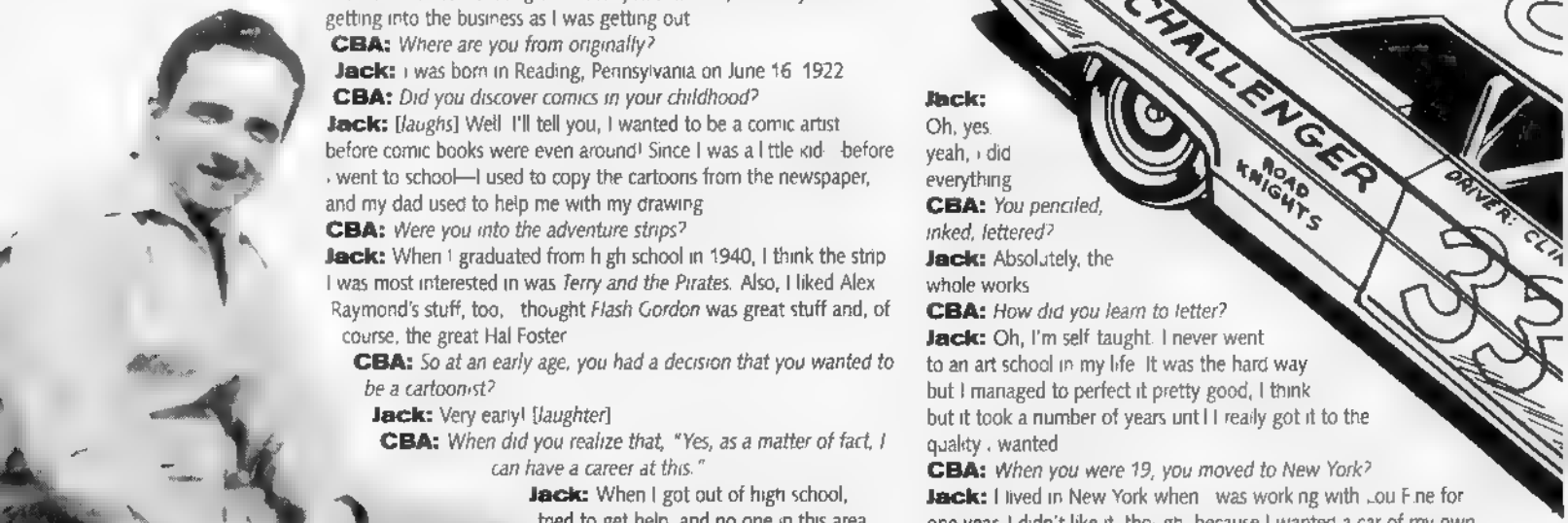
CBA: *And Lou Fine is considered a god amongst any number of artists, up to the present day. Getting back to "The Whistler" for a second, was that derivative of* The Shadow*? Was it a mystery book?*

Jack: Oh, he had his face covered like the Invisible Man, you know, with bandages. He was an international spy type character.

CBA: *It was mystery adventure stories, akin to Caniff's* Terry and the Pirates*?*

Jack: Yeah. I liked airplanes at that time, too.

CBA: *Well, you were 19 years old when you had the comic produced, right? Did you do everything on it?*



Jack: Oh, yes, yeah, I did everything.

CBA: *You penciled, inked, lettered?*

Jack: Absolutely, the whole works.

CBA: *How did you learn to letter?*

Jack: Oh, I'm self taught. I never went to an art school in my life. It was the hard way but I managed to perfect it pretty good, I think, but it took a number of years until I really got it to the quality I wanted.

CBA: *When you were 19, you moved to New York?*

Jack: I lived in New York when I was working with Lou Fine for one year. I didn't like it, though, because I wanted a car of my own which you couldn't have in New York, and being a young guy, about 19 years old, I didn't like the idea that every time I went out to eat, had to stand in line. Everything I did, you had to stand in line [*laughter*] whether you went to a movie or whatever it was, you know?

CBA: *A busy city.*

Jack: Yeah, and it was a lonely place, too, and I lived in the YMCA at William Sloane House on 34th Street, and I remember the room was so small! I could touch the walls by spreading my arms out [*laughter*]. It was very small.

CBA: *A sardine can, yeah! Was this Will Eisner's studio in Tudor City?*

Jack: It was on Lexington Avenue.

CBA: *Oh, it was "Busy" Arnold's studio?*

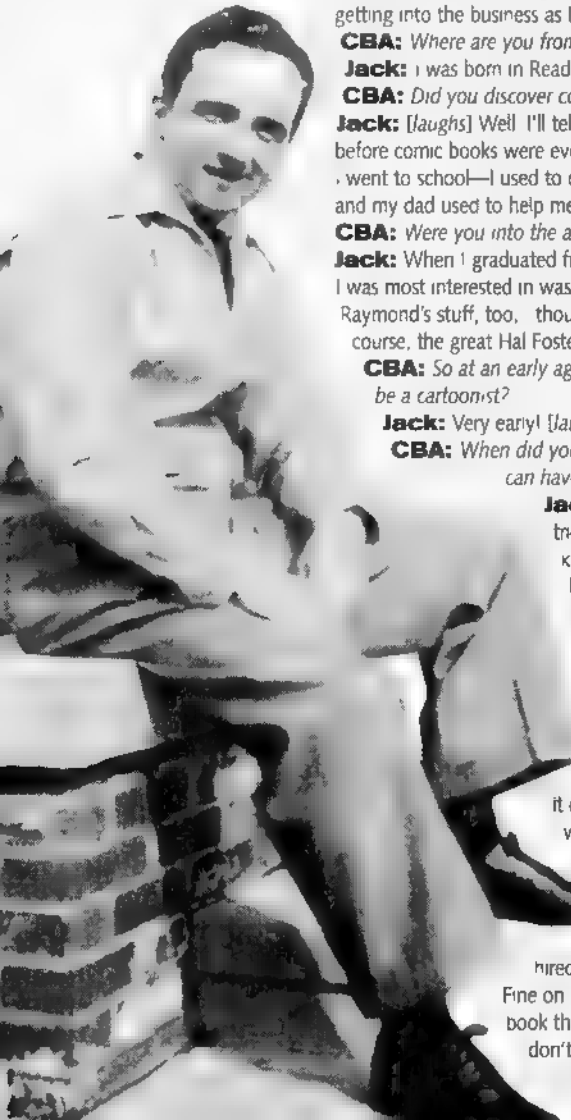
Jack: It was Arnold's studio, that's who it was.

CBA: *What were the offices like, as you recall?*

Jack: Well, for the time, they were adequate. There were several artists in each room.

CBA: *Was Chuck Cuidera there?*

Jack: Unfortunately, about the only one I can really remember is



Inset center: *Detail from Jack Keller's cover art to* Hot Rods and Racing Cars *#69. Reproduced from a silverprint. Courtesy of Dick Giordano. ©2001 the respective copyright holder.*

Below: *Portrait of a young comic book artist, Jack Keller at 27 years old. Courtesy of the artist.*

Mr Arnold I remember him, and a George something was the editor at the time, I can't remember his last name I remember there was another young fellow that was very talented, and I think he went nto the newspapers. Alex Kotsky. He and I were pretty good friends He'd come in as a freelancer—he wasn't working staff—but he was doing a nice job on the work he was illustrating

CBA: *What was he doing?*

Jack: It was a strip that had been done by Reed Crandall—a group of Air Force fighters—*Blackhawk*, that's what it was Reed came in, but I don t think ever met him

CBA: *What was Lou Fine like?*

Jack: Lou was a nice guy, just a little bit overweight and smoked like a stove I told him I never smoked, and he said, "Don't ever get started because once you do, by my age you'll become a chain smoker, and that's real bad "

CBA: *He was short, but quite stocky, right?*

Jack: That's exactly right. I used to eat lunch with him and so forth, and he was a real nice guy

CBA: *Were you aware of his reputation amongst artists at the time?*

Jack: Wel , I know he was pretty we l liked then, all around, because he was very talented, he did nice figures

CBA: *Yes, beautiful, really. So, you were living at the YMCA the whole year?*

Jack: Yeah, that's where I stayed Then after that, i decided I was tired, so I went out with some of my work, and I picked up a strip called "Johnny Blair in the Air," just a filler for *Captain Marvel* at Fawcett That's what I started with, and then very shortly thereafter, I got two strips from Fiction House, "Clipper Kirk" and "Suicide Smith."

CBA: *Did you go in-house to Fawcett? Were you still in the New York area?*

Jack: No, I went home then

CBA: *Okay, so it was freelance through the mail?*

Jack: Well, at that time, when you're starting out, it was a lot of traveling back and forth I had to bring the strips in, drive over in my car (which I was very proud to have then at that time)

CBA: *Did you deal with Wendell Crowley at Fawcett?*

Jack: I can't remember any of them

CBA: *So, you were continuing to do strips, you did the lettering, inking and writing, too?*

Jack: No, I didn't do the writing, not at all Let's see: "Clipper Kirk" and "Suicide Smith" had just pen names "Suicide Smith" was by "Capt. A.E Carruthers." We all had to work on it—previous artists had done the strip. "Cliff DuBois" was the name on "Clipper Kirk" we worked under at that time

CBA: *So you were able to maintain a decent living?*

Jack: Yes, that was from 1943 to '45 One [*Clipper Kirk*] was a Marine pilot, and the other [*Suicide Smith*] was Navy After the war, the war strips faded out, and I picked up some work for *Crime Does Not Pay*, for Charlie Biro and Bob Wood I did some strips for them

CBA: *Do you recall Bob Wood?*

Jack: Yes, I do remember Bob Wood He was the one I usually communicated with I saw Mr Biro a few times, too. Big, husky guy Bob Wood was very friendly to me, and very instructive. He gave me a lot of ideas on what to do. I was still in the formative stages in those years, I th nk

CBA: *So you learned about layout and storytelling from Bob Wood?*

Jack: No, no Storytell ng was totally on my own, and that came later on, when I decided to write the stories, until i went to Charlton

CBA: *Oh, I meant storytelling techniques through layout and design You worked on crime comics?*

Jack: Yes

CBA: *Throughout this, did you have an affinity for any of the strips you were working on? Did you prefer to work on the aviation strips?*

Jack: At that point, I was willing to do almost anything In fact, I did another strip for Hillman at that time, too, called "The Rosebud Sisters," which was sort of a take-off on *Arsenic and Old Lace*. The old ladies would even get into their old car and race in important races like Indy and all that sort of bunk. It was not to my liking at all, but I did t, [*laughter*] because it was someth ng to do!

CBA: *Right. Throughout all this time, you were living back home in Pennsylvania?*

Jack: Yeah living in Reading, all the time from then on

CBA: *From Hillman . ?*

Jack: Okay, that type of work lasted from 1946 to '49, and then in 1950, I went to see Stan Lee I think they were called Timely Comics at the time; it wasn't Marvel at that period. I started with a variety of war stories and a few weird comics, but then in 1951, Stan gave me *Kid Colt, Outlaw* to draw

CBA: *You had quite a long history on that strip, right?*

Jack: Yeah, I lasted to 1967

CBA: *Wow! That's one of the longest singular runs for one artist to work on a comic book!*

Jack: Well, it's a good long run, yes! [*laughter*] I had a long run on *Hot Rods and Racing Cars*, about 15 years, too

CBA: *So, did you receive full scripts from Stan?*

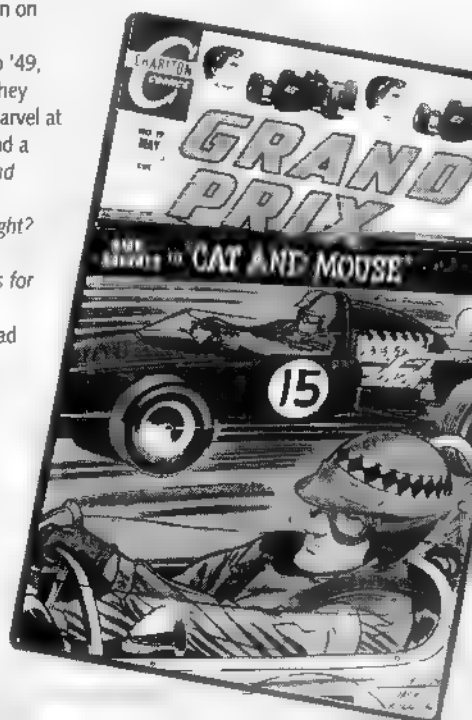
Jack: Yes

CBA: *By mail, or when you dropped off the job?*

Jack: Well, most of the time they'd send me the scripts by Specia Delivery mail, and then later on, they worked it a little different. they'd just give you the synopsis, and the artist would illustrate his own act ons and so forth, and then Stan or whoever wrote the strip would fill in the dialog and captions.

Above: *Now there's a concept—surfboards and motorcycles. Jack's cover to the shortlived title Surf n' Wheels, #6. ©2001 the respective copyright holder*

Below: *One of many Jack Keller car racing covers, this one Grand Prix #19 ©2001 the respective copyright holder*



KID COLT OUTLAW

THE LEGEND OF KID COLT... YEARS AGO KID COLT KILLED AN OUTLAW IN SELF-DEFENSE! BUT, BEING YOUNG AND FOOLISH, HE FLED, INSTEAD OF STAYING TO STAND TRIAL! SINCE THEN, HE HAS SPENT HIS LIFE TRYING TO ATONE FOR HIS MISTAKE!

Above: *Before and during his Charlton tenure, Jack worked on innumerable Atlas Western titles, notably* Kid Colt Outlaw. *Here's the perennial story header* **Spread:** *Bad guy—black hat Good guy—Kid Colt Vignettes of '50s Keller art. As reprinted in* Kid Colt Outlaw *#169* **Center inset background:** *The Atlas Comics logo. All images ©2001 Marvel Characters, Inc.*

CBA: *Which way was preferable to you, the full script or Marvel style?*

Jack: kind of liked both ways. I liked doing my own style, because sometimes some writers would put so many planes of action into it, you couldn't get really good close-ups, for instance, and I like to do nice close-ups, to make it more dramatic. But sometimes, certain writers would script to the effect that they would have three planes of action, and then you would almost have to have the foreground figures with their back to you!

CBA: *To see what's going on?*

Jack: Yeah

CBA: *Throughout your Marvel experience, did you write any of your own material?*

Jack: As I said, didn't write any of those stories. I never wrote a story for Stan Lee.

CBA: *When you received simple plot synopses, you fleshed out the story right? You added your own ideas?*

Jack: I did to a certain degree, yeah.

CBA: *Did you always ink your own work?*

Jack: No, no. Here's what happened. In 1957, while illustrating *Kid Colt, Outlaw* (I did the pen and ink work at that time), the books lost their distributor.

CBA: *Right, the collapse of American News.*

Jack: For a few months, nothing was being published, and when you're a freelancer—as I was at that time—that means no check, no pay, no money whatsoever! I had a family to support, a wife and three sons. I needed a job, so at that time, I went to work for Morganstern Chevrolet here in Reading because I liked cars a lot. But they said they would only hire me if I promised to remain selling new and used cars for them, so I had to agree that I would remain at least for a while. After about one month on the job selling cars, Stan Lee called and asked me to illustrate *Kid Colt* again. I said I could only have enough spare time to pencil it, so Stan said, "Okay," and for about a year or more, I had different staff inkers. One or two of them were very good... Dick Ayers did a nice job on the ones he did, and it was satisfactory to me, comparable to my own inking. But some of the others were not doing the strip justice.

CBA: *Rush jobs?*

Jack: Well, whatever they did, they just didn't have a technique, and didn't do the heads right—not to my satisfaction, anyway. So, after about a year, I decided that I wanted to quit the car business, and go back to doing the strip myself. At that time, the strip went from a monthly to a bi-monthly, so it wasn't enough work, and that's when I decided to make the move towards Charlton.

CBA: *Getting back to Atlas for a second, in the '50s, were all the scripts—as far as you can tell—by Stan?*

Jack: A lot of the strips were by Stan. I have a number of originals here. They were very kind in that respect, they sent a lot of the originals back to me. After they had a second run on them in the '80s, they sent me these strips, and I have a number of these originals in my possession now, which I'm very proud of.

CBA: *So the return of the artwork took place in the 1980s, right? It wasn't back in the '50s or the '60s?*

Jack: I wish I would've had them back then, because it certainly would've been helpful in obtaining work from different publishers if you'd had the work.

CBA: *Back in the '40s, did you go with portfolio in hand to the different publishers?*

Jack: That's exactly what I did.

CBA: *Did you have friends in the art community? Did you get to know certain people at all?*

Jack: Not that many, really. I really didn't know that many special ones other than the ones I mentioned to you. But my best friend eventually became Dick Giordano, but that was later.

CBA: *Okay, so roughly 1959, how did you hear about Charlton?*

Jack: Well, it wasn't '59—it was before that. It was about 1958. I looked in the comic books, and saw these racing stories in *Hot Rods and Racing Cars*, and I thought, "You know, I think I can contribute a lot to that." Except for the work done by Dick Giordano, most of the rest of the artists merely drew the cars from imagination, and they weren't really correct in a lot of ways, and I felt I had something to add. So I went to Derby and had some *Kid Colt* originals with me and I drew up two pages of just pencils of racing cars, in what I thought I would like to add to them. So they liked my work and gave me some scripts right away. One of them was a racing strip about the Mexican road race, and they liked it. I was also getting "Sheriff of Tombstone," *Cheyenne Kid*, and I did a little *Billy the Kid*. I did work in *Fightin' Marines, Fightin' Army*, and *Fightin' Air Force*. After a little time, when Dick Giordano took over, he liked my work very much, and at that time I hadn't been writing. I think the scripts were probably written by Joe Gill, I'm not sure. He was the number one writer there. I thought that I wanted to see different stories, because I was researching all these things. The scripts that had been submitted to me earlier were a bit limited in subject variation, and many of the shots I had to draw didn't offer me the situations I wanted to draw, wanted to make them more dramatic. Too many shots had spectators in the foreground, and I wanted action on the cars, and unlike most of the other artists in the field that drew from memory or imagination, I *researched* my cars, rules and race courses. If I drew a Ferrari or a hot rod, I wanted it to look like them! To achieve this, I was a devoted racing buff, watched every racing event on TV, read many books and magazines, and became an expert model builder and die-cast car collector. I judged several model-building car contests... still collect model cars, 1/43rd scale and 1/18th. I just love cars.

CBA: *Did you work on the actual full-size cars?*

Jack: No, I wasn't a mechanic. [*laughter*] I would've liked to, but never had time for it.

CBA: *That's interesting that you had a friendship with Dick Giordano, as his father was good mechanic, and Dick was around cars all his life. Did you guys bond?*

Jack: Oh, yes. At first, when I got there, Dick was the assistant editor, and Pat Musilli was the managing editor. Dick liked my work when he became managing editor, and that's when he gave me the lead on the first one. Dick Giordano and I would meet in New York—I visited his home in Derby, too—so we became good friends.

CBA: *You socialized?*

Jack: To a degree, yeah.

CBA: *The New York office, was that in the...?*

Jack: Well, I never met him in the New York office. Yeah. I guess did because we went out to eat in a restaurant—his wife and my wife were along, too.

CBA: *And you'd travel all the way up from Pennsylvania to Derby?*

Jack: Yes.

CBA: *How far a ride was that?*

Jack: Oh, at that time it was about a two-hour ride; that's about all. It's quicker now because they have better facilities.

CBA: *Just to backtrack for a second, was that call from Stan Lee, when American News collapsed, did that come as a total surprise?*

Jack: No, no, this was planned all along. He wanted me all along to keep doing *Kid Colt*, but when I got that call, of course I was glad to go back.

CBA: *No, I mean the previous call, when he called to say there was no more work for a period of time. Was that a total surprise?*

Jack: Well, yes it was, I guess. I'd have to say it probably was a surprise.

CBA: *When you had to go work for the dealership, was the new job at all involved with your art?*

Jack: No, no, I was a car salesman.

CBA: *Oh, man!* [laughs]

Jack: No, I went from one extreme to another. [*laughter*]

CBA: *Were you any good at it?*

Jack: I sold cars. I was pretty good, yeah. I made "Salesman of the Month" a couple of times.

CBA: *Did you like it at all?*

Jack: Well, I'll tell ya, it was a relief ... when I was illustrating, I was pretty skinny, a skinny little guy. But when I started selling cars, I was more relaxed, and eating junk food. [*laughter*] I put on a lot of weight, and I went from about 135 to about 170! I enjoyed it. It actually left a nice background for the work I did later on in the racing stuff.

CBA: *When you started working for Charlton, you worked on Joe Gill's scripts, right? When did you start writing your own material?*

Jack: Well, when Pat Masulli was there, I had this urge—because there were a lot of stories that I felt I would like to draw, and I was a Formula One nut at that time, too—so I wrote a script or two and mailed it to him. Pat at first didn't want to do it, because they wanted everything done by a staff writer. Charlton was pretty much that way. When I first got there, they had one book called *Hot Rods and Racing Cars*, and then after I started illustrating, doing their scripts and all, they moved to two books, and then when Dick Giordano got in, Dick dumped everything on me, and I did the covers, the writing, the stories, and it went to four books! I did all the lead features in each one, and sometimes I would do the whole book.

CBA: *Did you just naturally fall into doing your own writing?*

Jack: It was just an urge on my part, I had no training whatsoever.

CBA: *Were you happy with the results?*

Jack: Oh, yeah! At that time, I had a natural, easy flow for conversation and so forth. In my opinion, the stories were better. It showed it in the sales, too, for a while. That's why I said it went up to four books for a while!

CBA: *I guess the proof is in the pudding! With the rates you were working with Stan, and the rates at Derby, were they significantly different?*

Jack: Yeah, they were. [*laughs*] Everybody knows how poor Charlton paid! I have the wages back here, another page. Well, in 1941, you just want me to go all the way through?

CBA: *Yeah!*

Jack: Okay. In '41, when I did "The Whistler" for Dell, I got $15 a page, the whole, complete job. Then, in '42, on *The Spirit* backgrounds, I was getting $40 a week, working in New York. But in the evening, I used to make up to $90 a week, because I used to illustrate other stories. One was "The Clock," and we got $20 a page at Quality.

CBA: *What was "The Clock"?*

Jack: He was a detective, a private eye.

CBA: *This was moonlighting?*

Jack: Yeah, I did it back in my wonderful room, where I could touch the walls. [*laughter*] Then, in 1942-45 on "Johnny Blair" for Fawcett, I got $20 a page. "Clipper Kirk" and "Suicide Smith" also paid $20 a page. Then, in 1946-49, I was still getting $20 a page for art. At that time, there wasn't much of a change. Then, in 1950, when I worked for Marvel, I started at $25, then went to $30, and then to $38 in just two years. So I'd moved up very nicely, and that's when I really started turning out quality work.

CBA: *In any given week, how many pages could you put out?*

Jack: Well, at that time, I don't remember how many it was, but I got to be faster in the end. Generally speaking, when I was doing *Hot Rods and Racing Cars*, it would take me about an hour to an hour and a half to pencil a page, and about an hour and a half to two hours to ink a page. Scripts, I wrote them on a Sunday morning, and I would write the work for the week in an hour or two.

CBA: *So that was about three pages complete a day?*

Jack: Yeah, two or three pages, depending on what was in demand.

CBA: *When did you start a family?*

Jack: That's another story. [*laughter*] Let's see, I got married in '51. Then, we had the two boys. I'm divorced today, that's why I said "another story", in '79, I got divorced.

CBA: *You had the obligations.*

Jack: I had obligation for my sons, of course.

CBA: *So, were you just working straight-out during the '60s, when you were working both for Charlton and for Marvel?*

Jack: Yeah.

CBA: *Was it taxing?*

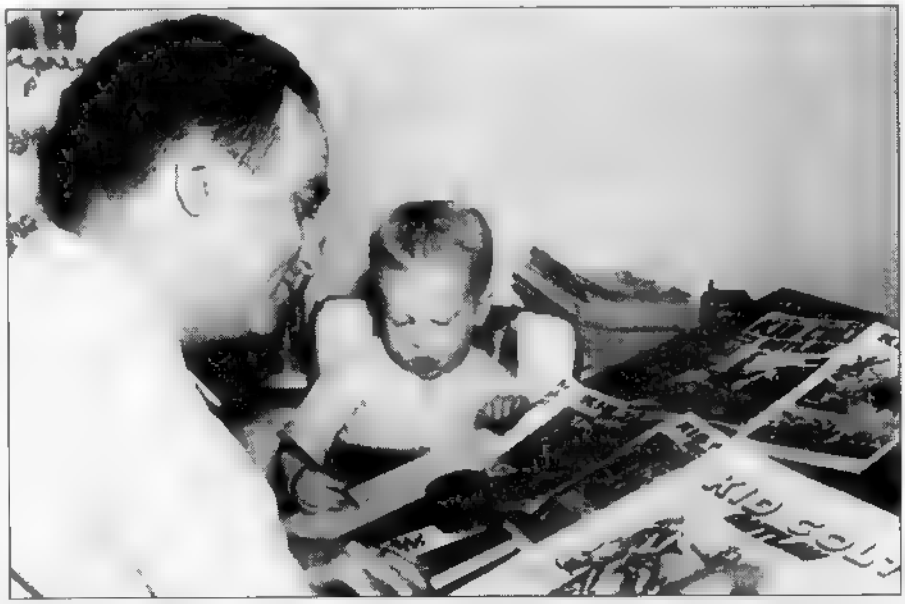
Jack: Well, it went on until '67, and then Dick Giordano, when he was editor, wanted me to work exclusively for Charlton—he wanted me to do all the books and nearly all the covers. So, he made me an offer of $35 a page—that included script—and then I told Stan Lee I was going. *Kid Colt* was starting to get weak anyway at that time, and I would've had to do super-heroes for Stan. I wasn't too keen on that.

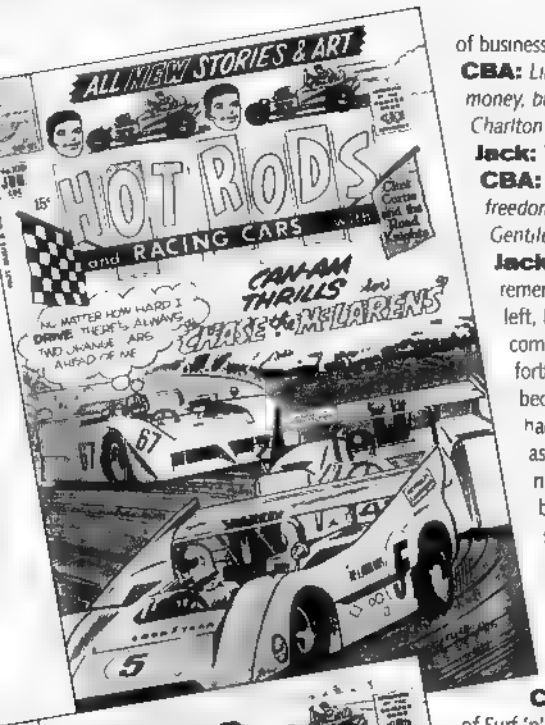
CBA: *Why not?*

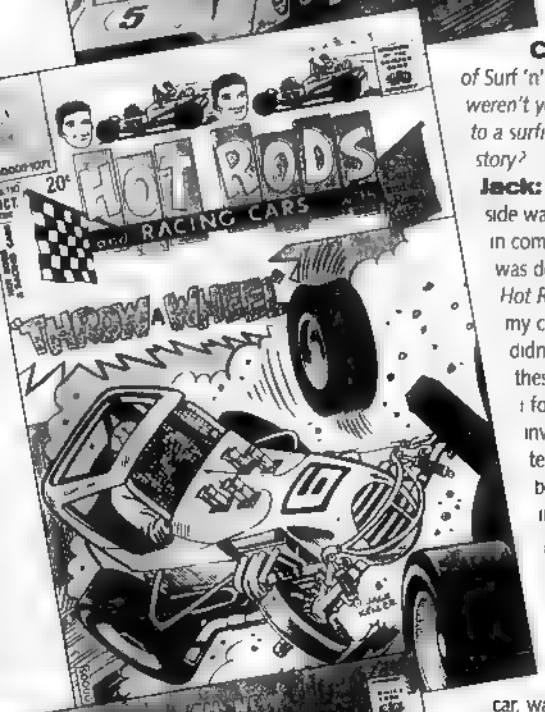
Jack: I just didn't have that much interest in super-heroes. I liked Westerns and racing cars! [*laughs*] Anyway, Stan Lee made me a counteroffer, and the offer was more lucrative than Giordano's, but the thing about Giordano is he offered me more freedom, and I liked the idea of writing my own stuff. Actually, I guess in the long run I would've made similar money because of the fact that I could do my own stuff more quickly than I could do material I wasn't familiar with. If I'd had to have done super-heroes, I would've been spending too much time digging for reference. It would've been a whole new line

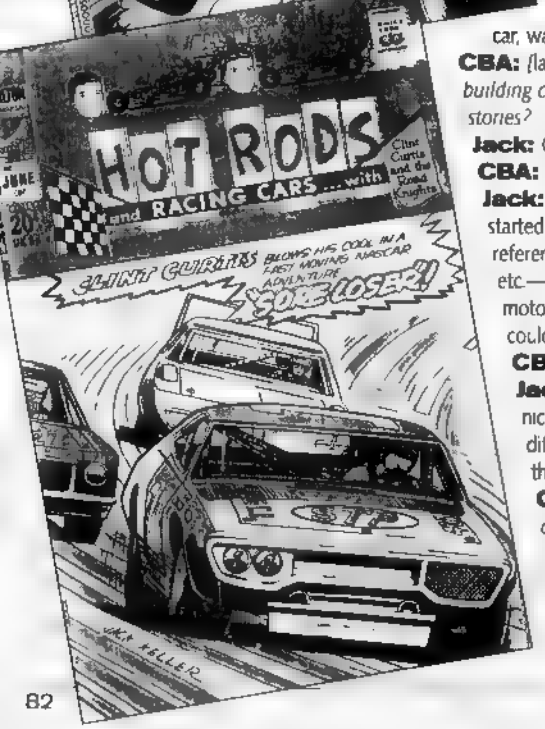
©2001 Marvel Characters, Inc.

Below: *Jack Keller (at 33) and son, two artists hard at work. Note the Kid Colt Outlaw reference on Jack's table. Courtesy of the artist.*









of business for me

CBA: *Like you said, it would've been similar money, but obviously you did more work for Charlton*

Jack: That's right.

CBA: *But it was more enjoyable because of the freedom? What happened when Dick left? Sal Gentile came in*

Jack: There was George Wildman, but I don t remember the other guy. After Dick Giordano left, I didn't go to Derby anymore. I just communicated with them on the phone and so forth. I think the scripts weakened then, because they made a lot of changes, and they had me doing a lot of war and stuff and not as many hot rod stories, although I did do a number of them. They cut the books, they bought licenses—that was *Beetle Bailey* and so forth—and they started to have the work done in Mexico. They cut the hot rod books in half that was the problem, so it was an economic move. Charlton was always one for economic moves, for some reason or another.

CBA: *Do you remember how the concept of Surf 'n' Wheels started? You were part of that, weren't you? It was like half the issue was devoted to a surfing story, and the other half to a hot rod story?*

Jack: Yeah, yeah, with "Ken King"! The other side was a *motorcycle* story. The one thing I added in comic books that I don't think any other artist was doing at the time, when I started drawing *Hot Rods and Racing Cars*, doing a lot of cars, my cars were good but the hand-drawn wheels didn't just quite suit me, so I noticed that in all these technical drawings, they were perfect, so I found out they were using templates. I invested a couple of hundred bucks in templates, and all of a sudden, my wheels became perfect! It really added to the drawings a lot, it really pleased me, I was very glad I did it, because it made them real simple to draw, then too! All I had to do was take a ballpoint pen, and whip them around at all these different angles, and you had perfect wheels! That was probably the hardest thing to draw on a car, was to make good wheels!

CBA: *[laughs] Did you initially start buying and building car models to use as reference for your stories?*

Jack: Oh, yes, very much so.

CBA: *Then you grew to love the hobby?*

Jack: Well, I had the hobby possibly before I started. To make the cars authentic, I used a lot of reference from magazines too—*Motor Trend*, etc.—I read a lot of car magazines, to get the motors and such to get as close to realistic as could.

CBA: *So you kept clip files?*

Jack: Oh, yes. When I did a story, it was nice holding a model—you had it from all different angles—and you could easily sketch them accurately.

CBA: *Did you have the same kind of desire for accuracy with your Western or war stories?*

Jack: You know, I tried. The war stories were very difficult. Reading did not give you the opportunities that a New York artist has, with the great stores, libraries and every place else you could get information on any kind of uniforms, and make them more accurate. But I tried. I used to build airplanes at one time, too.

CBA: *Really into model-making, eh?*

Jack: Yeah, I was in it pretty good. Today, I'm pretty heavy into it yet through collecting.

CBA: *How would you describe your collection? Is it the number of models that you have, or...? How do you guys brag to each other?*

Jack: *[laughs]* Well, let's just put it this way: I've got a *lot* of them *[laughter]* I was a 1/43rd collector for a time, I don't know if you're familiar with that.

CBA: *That would be really small?*

Jack: That's about a four- or five-inch car. In the last couple of years, I've gone into 1/18th, which is very accurate. If I'd have had them, it would've been even better yet, because they have detailed engines and everything. They're beautiful, all around.

CBA: *You even work part time in a model shop now?*

Jack: Well, where I work at is, when I retired in . Let's see, in 1973, when Charlton was weak and I had to get other work. I went back to selling cars again and up to 1984. I sold cars. Chevrolets, Hondas, and used cars. I like used cars much better than new because they're much easier to sell and you make more money on them! When you have a *used* car, you have a one of a kind—there's no two used cars exactly alike in wear and mileage and so forth. But when you go to a new car you could spend maybe several hours with a customer, and they say, "Yeah, that's great, I didn't know about that car, I'm glad you explained everything to me, but I have one more place to check," so they'd go to the other dealer in town, and the guy'd say "Do you have this car in stock?" They'd say "Yeah, we've got one." "Can you give me a deal on it? Can you beat this deal?" And they'd say, "We'll give you another hundred bucks off." You'd get your deal with the new car out the window but with a used car, it's a different story.

CBA: *Did you completely leave comic book artistry behind in '73?*

Jack: . left it behind. Well, Dick Giordano used to ship a few strips for me for a year or two.

CBA: *What, from DC?*

Jack: Yeah, some were from DC. He had a hot rod book called *Hot Wheels*. I did some fillers for that, and I did one story for that. That didn't last very long.

CBA: *Right, six issues. Were you a fan of Alex Toth's work?*

Jack: He was a good artist, I know his work, looking at it, but I didn't know him personally.

CBA: *Did you keep your eye on the field at all, what the other publishers were coming out with? Were you a comics fan when you were a professional?*

Jack: Yeah, yeah! I've stacks of my old comics here and stuff. I used to like some of the war artists, too. Joe Kubert, I always thought he was great.

CBA: *I don't think we've finished with the rates, I think we left off with the mid-'50s with Marvel.*

Jack: Here we go.

CBA: *You had quite a jump with Stan?*

Jack: That's why the rates went to $38 in '52, but then '53 came around, and the Eisenhower administration, and we had a lot of problems with women's clubs and so forth, and everyone was down on comic books at that time. We were the "evil" creating juvenile delinquency, you're probably too young to remember those things. Anyway, what happened up until 1960, every year or two Stan would call me up, and he'd say, "Jack, I've got good news and bad news for you. The good news is, I like your work, and I can give you all you want. The bad news is, we have to cut your rates $2 or $3 a page." This happened several times, I'd keep getting advancement, and keep getting less money! *[laughter]* So by the end of 1960 we were down from $38 a page to $25 a page! That was a rough period, but I did some of my nicest work then, too. It didn't affect the quality of my work, I did real good work for him in the Westerns I have some real nice stuff here I penciled and inked.

CBA: *Do you have affection for those characters, Kid Colt, Outlaw? Did you enjoy doing them?*

Jack: Very much so. Yeah, I loved Westerns, too. You could dress a character any way you wanted to, as long as you followed the

Western patterns. I liked to draw horses, too; I did some nice horse illustrations.

CBA: *What was Stan like?*

Jack: Stan Lee was a very nice guy. He was all business, though, when I went in to see Stan, you'd state your business, and as soon as you're finished, he'd stand there and just chat, you left. He was a very busy and very creative guy. I think of all the people I met in the business, he's probably the most intelligent. Dick Giordano's a close second.

CBA: *When you went up to visit with Dick, you stuck around, hung around for a little while?*

Jack: Oh, yeah, yeah. We became friends.

CBA: *Did you feel Charlton was coming out with special books when Dick was the editor?*

Jack: Oh, yeah, I think it was much more progressive than in any other period, with any of the other editors. I don't think they compared to him.

CBA: *Was the development of* Surf 'n' Wheels, *were you consulted with that?*

Jack: Oh, no, they just dumped that on me. I was really not a motorcycle fanatic like I was a car fanatic.

CBA: *What would you consider the best work you've done in the field?*

Jack: I don't know. I liked the *Kid Colt* illustration every bit as good as what I did on *Hot Rods and Racing Cars*, but I'm pretty proud of the work I did on *Racing Cars*, because I've gotten some nice praises from several people that are authorities, such as yourself.

CBA: *Well, I'm no authority! [laughs]*

Jack: Pete Millar gave me a nice letter and so forth, he thought my stuff was really nice.

CBA: *Overall, what were your feelings about working for Charlton?*

Jack: I liked it. I thought the pay should've been a lot better than it was. When I started it at Charlton, I was getting $25 from Stan but they gave me a big, whopping $12 a page. *[laughter]* Stan Lee's cut rates down to $25 didn't seem that bad by comparison. Then it went up to $15, and then it went to $20. It remained at $20 for a while, and then when I started writing, they gave me another $5 for the stories. They didn't give much, I'm telling ya! *[laughs]* You *had* to love it! *[laughter]* To stay with it.

CBA: *Was it a difficult pace to keep up with, to support a family?*

Jack: No, no, I always had enough, we always provided well. The good Lord always saw that we had money. I wasn't overly lucrative but I had enough. I always had nice cars and everything else, nice home I live in, a nice single home. I made sufficient.

CBA: *You've done an enormous amount of work in the field, over many decades, stretching back to*

Jack: Almost 32 years or thereabouts.

CBA: *Did you receive any recognition during the time — did you ever hear from fans?*

Jack: My biggest problem was living here in Reading, and not associating with other people in my field. I was always kind of a loner, and I did meet Steranko, who was just going into the business about the time I was going out. Nice young man. He's done very well in the field, I know.

CBA: *Have you ever gone to conventions?*

Jack: I did, earlier, yes, and I sort of dropped it when I was getting into selling cars. I couldn't get the days off, and so forth, when they had the conventions. I just dropped out of the Cartoonists' Association and so forth. I never put too much thought until recently a gentleman that runs a comic book store in town here had a convention. He runs Golden Eagle Comics. So, that's kind of starting the whole thing off, and I've got some nice recognition then from different fans, and then all of a sudden, I'm getting this recognition. Fans have been writing to me, and I don't know where they can find me, because I'm not on the Internet! But they've been finding out about me, and a lot of guys are interested in my Western and the racing stuff. For the hot rod stuff I have, there's some guy that's really hot on it, some architect down in Georgia, and he would buy anything I've got. I don't have that much! Charlton wasn't that great, and all my really good stuff, they never gave back to me. I only have two covers, and they were early covers that I did. I'm keeping them.

Some of the other stuff, most of the other stuff I'm going to keep.

CBA: *So overall, you're happy you got into comics?*

Jack: Oh, yes, yes. As I told you, I wanted to do it since I was a little kid, preschool or whatever. *[laughter]* I had neighbors and so forth save Sunday comics for me, the ones I liked, and if we didn't get them. All in all, I liked it very much.

CBA: *How would you like to be remembered?*

Jack: Well, as a... I don't know what to say about that!

CBA: *You can always edit it in! It's very interesting to find you after seeing your name back in the '60s and in the Charlton books, and then all of a sudden, you'd just vanished from the field.*

Jack: Well, that's it, I just did vanish from the field in 1973! That's what makes it so difficult for me to remember all these things, because it was 27 years ago.

CBA: *Do you think something was lost when comics went predominantly over to super-heroes?*

Jack: Oh, yeah, I do, definitely. They tried some racing stories a few years ago, stories about NASCAR, but they were all documentaries, and were dull to read! I thought my stuff had better action than what they did. I felt my stories were more interesting to read than what those documentaries were. They only lasted for maybe about a year.

CBA: *What made your stories more interesting?*

Jack: Well, the fact that my cars really looked like the *real* cars, for one thing. I researched them, made them as dramatic as I could, without being ridiculous. I didn't do *Speed Racer*-type stuff, nothing like that, where they were real wild and totally imaginary. If I wrote a story—let's say I wanted to do a story about Le Mans. I'd get a couple of *Road & Track* magazines, and I would read what *really* happened, and what the courses looked like and so forth, and what could possibly happen on these corners, and then I would get the race driver in the race, and in trouble, and then figure ways to get him out of it, and so they were all based on as much realism as I could, and to make the stories somewhat authentic, and yet fiction.

CBA: *For the genre of hot rod comics, you're the biggest name in the genre itself. Do you think hot rod comics today could be impactful, could be interesting, could be fun?*

Jack: I think if it's properly done, yes. If they do it like a documentary, no! But if they do it in good fiction, and drama, I think it's got a great chance. Not me, but younger people! *[laughter]*

CBA: *Do you do any drawing any more?*

Jack: No, I don't. In fact, I gave my templates to my grandson, and I'm trying to teach him to draw wheels! *[laughter]* Get him started. He wants to be a car designer.

CBA: *How old is he?*

Jack: Ten.

CBA: *So, is that how you mostly spend your time?*

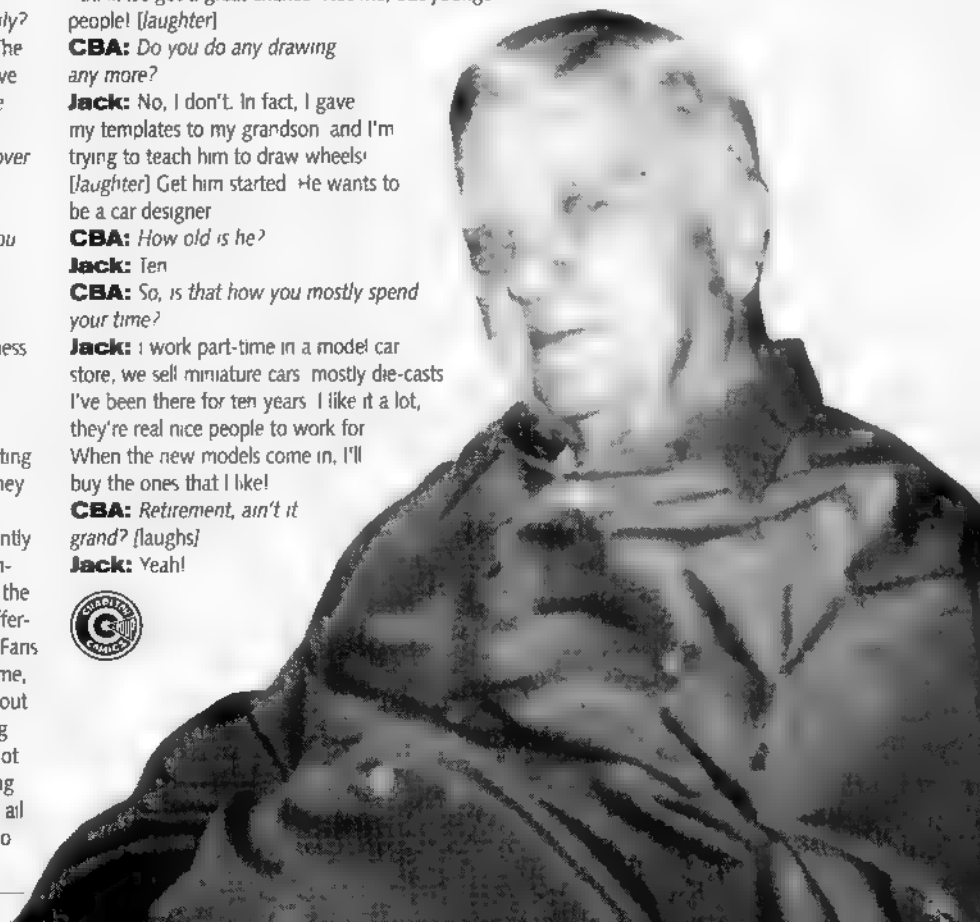
Jack: I work part-time in a model car store, we sell miniature cars, mostly die-casts. I've been there for ten years. I like it a lot, they're real nice people to work for. When the new models come in, I'll buy the ones that I like!

CBA: *Retirement, ain't it grand? [laughs]*

Jack: Yeah!

Opposite page: *A trio of Jack's realistically depicted race car covers for Charlton. The artist prided himself on his faithful accuracy in delineating cars. ©2001 the respective copyright holder.*

Below: *A recent photo of comic book artist—and used car sales man!—Jack Keller. Courtesy of the artist.*



PAM: Artist with a Vengeance

Part two of our Peter A. Morisi interview: '70s Charlton

Conducted by Glen D. Johnson

In CBA #9 we interviewed PAM about his early comics career in general and specifically about his 1960s work at Charlton, notably Peter Cannon. Thunderbolt. *We asked noted comics fan Glen D Johnson to follow up with the artist on his '70s material for the Derby, Connecticut publisher, significantly the crime title* Vengeance Squad. *This interview was conducted by mail in January, 2001*

Glen D. Johnson: *What year did you retire from the NYPD?*
Pete Morisi: I worked for 20 years (and some odd months) for the New York Police Department before I retired from "the job." It provided me and my family the security and medical attention (doctors, dentists, etc.) that I wanted, a life I would have been hard-pressed to afford as a freelance comic book artist.
Glen: *I know for many years you felt pressured by your job to devote much time to your art. I seem to recall you were always pushing deadlines and hurrying your artwork. Is it true that much of your art was hurried and that your art might have been improved if you could have spent more time on it?*
Pete: Sure. The more time you devote to an art or writing assignment, the better the result. I also would have taken some special art courses — but time was against me.

Below: *Unpublished page from* Vengeance Squad *#6, written by Jo Gill and rendered by PAM, a.k.a Peter A. Morisi. Courtesy of the artist. ©2001 the respective copyright holder*

THERE! WHAT DID I TELL YOU? ISN'T THAT A GREAT SIGHT?
ROOMS BUGGED!
YES, ERIC, I KNOW! IT'S BEAUTIFUL TULSA AND I HAVE THE SAME VIEW FROM OUR ROOMS NOW, WE'D BETTER GET READY FOR DINNER. THERE'LL BE NEARLY FIFTY WEEK-END GUESTS THERE!
THE DINNER WAS LAVISH! CHAMPAGNE, CAVIAR. EVERY DELICACY KNOWN TO MAN WAS SERVED IN THE GREAT DINING ROOM! AFTERWARDS, THE GUESTS MINGLED, AS THE V-SQUAD REMAINED ALERT!
WHEN MME. OTOKOPOULOS HIRED THE VENGEANCE SQUAD TO PROTECT HER GUESTS, SHE SAID WE COULD CHARGE TRIPLE OUR USUAL RATES! NOW I SEE WHY! THERE'S ENOUGH LOOT IN THIS ROOM TO BUY EIGHT COUNTRIES OUTRIGHT!
THAT WAITER IS CARRYING A SMALL GUN! IN FACT, ALL THE SERVANTS ARE ARMED! THE QUESTION IS: ARE WE BEING PROTECTED OR ENDANGERED BY MME. OTOKOPOULOS'S PEOPLE?

Glen: *What was your work schedule like in the early 1970s while working for Charlton?*
Pete: Work for the NYPD for eight hours, draw comic books for eight hours, and sleep for eight hours. Only, the sleep for eight hours never got realized — interruptions, family problems, and the stress of working 8:00-4:00/4:00-12:00/and 12:00-8:00 week after week took a heavy toll.
Glen: *The last few years of Charlton's existence you did mostly horror and love stories. Which of these did you prefer?*
Pete: I enjoyed doing horror stories, and romance stories were a nice change of pace. Joe Gill kept his scripts simple and uncomplicated, a very rare talent indeed, these days.
Glen: *The one exception to love and horror stories was something titled* Vengeance Squad *that ran six issues. This was written by Joe Gill. It consisted of two guys and a gal who were adventurers. It always reminded me of the Fantastic Four without super powers and minus Johnny Storm. Did you enjoy this feature, and do you recall doing it?*
Pete: Sure, I remember doing *Vengeance Squad*. A strip that "started slow" but was getting better with each issue. Joe Gill was really getting into it by issue #6, but that's when Charlton went under. It could have been a good one.
Glen: *Did you have any input with the Vengeance Squad, and did you do much rewriting?*
Pete: Yep, I re-wrote bits and pieces of almost all of Joe Gill's scripts. His personality was such that he didn't mind my adding things, or taking things out. As I said, Joe was a very rare talent indeed.
Glen: *George Wildman was editor at Charlton in the early '70s. How was he to work with, and did you know him very well?*
Pete: George Wildman was a piece of cake as an editor. He never complained, and that made me try all the harder to give him good stuff. Masulli, Giordano, and Gentile were the same, all gentlemen, although I heard that Masulli was a tough-cookie, but not with me.
Glen: *It's been commented on and I agree that there is a strong similarity between your background art and Alex Toth. You both drew silhouettes and shadows in a similar style. Is this your natural style or did you try to emulate Toth's style?*
Pete: I'm flattered that you think my stuff has a strong similarity to Alex Toth's stuff, but no, that's my natural style. I admire his work to no end. If anything, I started out working in George Tuska's style, but even that is drifting away.
Glen: *In* CBA *#9 you related how you came to draw a single story for D.C. in* Dark Mansion *#11 titled "Bum Wrap." This has always been one of my favorite examples of your art. A lot has to do with the quality of a DC story over a Charlton story. Did it bother you that so many of the stories you drew for Charlton turned out crummy looking because of the lack of a topnotch reproduction?*
Pete: Not really, although I would have liked better color on my work. Ditko, Boyette, Aparo, Sattler, and others all suffered the same fate, but got through it okay.
Glen: *Your lone DC work was published in 1973. Even though you lost money on this project because of DC editors wanting to check each step of your artwork, treating you like a green artist, had you any hint that Charlton was going to close its doors in a few years, do you think you might have sought more work from DC?*
Pete: Probably. Either DC or Marvel. I always liked Stan Lee's stuff, and probably would have gone in that direction.
Glen: *Is T-bolt the only super hero strip you drew?*
Pete: Yes, as far as I can remember.
Glen: *I'm going to assume super-heroes were your favorite genre. Is this true?*
Pete: I think that's a tie with super-heroes, Westerns, and crime.
Glen: *Were you interested in drawing cars and airplanes?*
Pete: Nope. I leave stuff like that to Al Williamson.
Glen: *What did you enjoy drawing the most?*
Pete: T-bolt, Kid Montana and Lash Larue.
Glen: *You've mentioned Batman was always one of your favorite characters. Would you have liked to have drawn a Batman story, and perhaps written it as well?*
Pete: Yep, that would have been a dream come true.
Glen: *Were there any other DC or Marvel characters you would like to have drawn?*
Pete: Captain America, Captain Marvel, the old Daredevil.

Glen: *In the first part of our interview, you said one of your first jobs was to ink a Sub-Mariner story. How many Sub-Mariner stories did you ink, and do you recall who the penciler was?*
Pete: I inked one story, penciled by Chic Stone, and I was "let go" after that, for being too slow.
Glen: *If you saw the story today, do you think you would recognize that you inked it?*
Pete: No. That was my first "staff" job, and I really didn't know what was expected of me .. so, I froze.
Glen: *After working almost exclusively for Charlton for so many years, were there any clues looking back that Charlton was about to stop publishing comics when it did?*
Pete: No—none, but when it was over—it was over.
Glen: *Do you recall who called to tell you that Charlton was calling it quits?*
Pete: A Charlton associate editor named Pearson.
Glen: *Since Charlton had a backlog of artwork, I assume some of your artwork was never published. Can you comment on this?*
Pete: I was happy with the stuff I was turning out at that point, but I never saw that art published.
Glen: *Did you have current scripts on hand when you were notified Charlton was closing its doors?*
Pete: I was working on one script and had three more back-up scripts ready to go. When the call came, I sent everything back.
Glen: *Were you paid for all artwork you completed for Charlton?*
Pete: Yes. The rates may have been under par at Charlton, but they paid me what they owed me.
Glen: *Having been in the business for as long as you were, what might Charlton have done to keep its line of comics profitable?*
Pete: Correct their distribution problem, which was bad.
Glen: *Were you familiar with Charlton Bullseye put out by Bob Layton and Roger Stern during Charlton's last years? They had art work by Alex Toth, John Byrne, Steve Ditko, Jeff Jones, and you among many others. The art was often superior to the comics.*
Pete: I never worked directly for the *Bullseye* people. The stuff of mine that they printed was gotten from Charlton.
Glen: *Many times over the years, you were offered the job of editor at Charlton. Had you given any thought to accepting this position once you retired from the NYPD, if it were offered?*
Pete: Only if I were given a free hand, like Dick Giordano had at Charlton.
Glen: *Your retirement and Charlton's closing down its operation came about the same time. This must have been an upsetting time for you when you had looked forward to devoting your time to writing and drawing comics and suddenly having all the time you wanted but no outlet for your work. Did this frustrate you?*
Pete: Uh-huh, but them's the breaks. Looking back, I'm happy that I was able to produce stuff with a reasonable amount of quality given my NYPD work schedule.
Glen: *You once mentioned Charlton never lost money on its artwork. Why didn't they?*
Pete: I've been told that Charlton had a number of outlets for their comics stuff, be it overseas publications or reprint rights, but sooner or later every piece of art paid for itself.
Glen: *Did you have any association with Steve Ditko?*
Pete: We met a couple of times (while delivering art at a Charlton office) and talked. I remember bawling him out for leaving the *Spider-Man* strip at Marvel.
Glen: *What was Steve like?*
Pete: Quiet, easy-going, thoughtful, all in all, a nice guy.
Glen: *Did Charlton ever throw office parties for the staff?*
Pete: Not that I know of—but the staff was in Derby, Connecticut and I was in New York.
Glen: *Did you ever get a chance to talk shop with any of Charlton's artists or writers?*
Pete: Steve Ditko and Rocky Mastroserio once or twice, and Dick Giordano (on the phone) quite often.
Glen: *How often did you get up to the Charlton headquarters at Derby, Connecticut?*
Pete: Twice, I think. One time I was so late with a *T-bolt* story that I drove to Derby, Connecticut and delivered it in person.
Glen: *At Charlton, who did you see and what would you do?*

AH, YOU ARE AWAKE NOW, ERIC REDD! YOU ARE MY GREATEST DANGER! THE JET PLANE I SENT OUT TO DESTROY YOU FAILED... BUT I WILL NOT!
OWWW! YOU'RE HURTING ME!
MISS CANDY ORR IS COMING WITH US, REDD! SHE DIES IF YOU TRY TO PREVENT OUR ESCAPE!
OKAY, NIKLOS, YOU HOLD ALL THE ACES! I DON'T CARE IF YOU STEAL EVERY DIAMOND IN EUROPE... JUST SEE TO IT THAT CANDY ISN'T HARMED!
YOU ARE WISER THAN I BELIEVED, ERIC REDD!
AT ANCHOR IN A SNUG LITTLE HARBOR THE YACHT OF THE DIAMOND QUEEN FLOATED SERENELY!
TAKE THE TREASURE ABOARD THE YACHT! I WILL MAKE SURE WE ARE NOT PURSUED!
A FEW GRENADES WILL DISABLE EVERY FAST VESSEL IN THE HARBOR!
DIAMOND QUEEN
8

Above: *Another unpublished page from Vengeance Squad #6. Courtesy of the artist. ©2001 the respective copyright holder.*

Pete: I saw Pat Masuil and owner John Santangelo. Pat showed me around the Charlton operation and John offered to buy lunch.
Glen: *Any insight you can give fans about Charlton's last days?*
Pete: I'm afraid not. I never got involved with "office happenings"—I just did my work and minded my own business.
Glen: *Since you own the copyrights on your creation Peter Cannon Thunderbolt, you are probably one of the few that has ownership of a character you created. At this time, do you have any plans for Thunderbolt?*
Pete: No, not at this time, but the future is... in the future.
Glen: *I think there is quite a following of Pete Morisi fans around the country, but you've never been very social as far as attending comic conventions, etc. Is there any special reason why you rarely make an appearance at such events?*
Pete: Holding down two jobs kept me busy enough—just never had the time. Now, that I do have the time, bad health is taking its toll.
Glen: *What is your feeling about the comic book industry today?*
Pete: Special effects, special colors, special paper, monsters, and more monsters, special prices . I don't knock them but I long for the old 64-page comic books—with four or five stories per issue: Superman/Slam Bradley/Batman/Zatara!—I feel for the kids of today, who will never know that simple time.

Center inset background: *Vignette of PAM's cover to Vengeance Squad #2, the artist's first VS issue. Frank Bolle drew #1. ©2001 the respective copyright holder.*

Sattler in the Saddle

The ubiquitous artist on *Yang*, *Billy the Kid*, and life in comics

Conducted by Jon B. Cooke
Transcribed by Jon B. Knutson

Above: *Unpublished Warren Sattler drawing of his trademark Charlton characters, Yang and Billy the Kid. Art ©2001 Warren Sattler. Characters ©2001 the respective copyright holder.*

Warren Sattler may be a name many find vaguely familiar and yet instantly recognizable. With one foot in the world of syndicated comics strips, the other in comic books, and a hand in commercial art, Warren seemed to be everywhere in the 1970s, perhaps most significantly in the pages of National Lampoon, *where his chameleon-like talents adapting other artists' styles was put to superb use. But you'll also find the gentleman's work in such diverse publications as* Help!, Playboy, witzend, Cracked, *and, of course, Charlton comic books. Most memorably, Warren was artist on* Yang, *the Kung Fu Western strip written by Joe Gill, and* Billy the Kid, *where the artist also contributed some beautifully painted covers. The following telephone interview took place on March 14, 2000, and the transcript was edited by the artist.*

Comic Book Artist: *Where are you from, Warren?*

Warren Sattler: Meriden, Connecticut. And I'm back here again!

CBA: *Born and bred?*

Warren: Yep! I've spent most of my life here, except when I was in the Air Force.

CBA: *When did you develop an interest in art?*

Warren: Oh, when I was a little squirt. In fact, I have a color copy of a *Terry and the Pirates* strip on my wall dated March 1946, the last year Caniff was doing it, and it's from the day I decided to be a cartoonist. I was 11.

CBA: *Why was that such a memorable strip?*

Warren: Well, I'm basically a shy person, and I loved movies, and everything about this particular strip was like a movie. A strip like that would give me a chance to make my own movies and make stories I liked. Unfortunately, by the time I was ready to do strips, adventure strips were dying. They turned to humor.

CBA: *Were you looking to get a job specifically in comic books?*

Warren: No, that was an accident. I was ending my work on *The Jackson Twins*, and Derby happened to be not far from my home, so I went there to look for work, and I stayed there for about five years.

CBA: *What do you prefer. The syndicated life or comic books?*

Warren: Well, when you've got a family—and I had five kids—a regular pay check was great. That's what I preferred. In fact, because of Caniff, I guess, in that strip I just told you about, that's what I decided I wanted to do, and it just stuck in my mind. I did have the most fun at Charlton, though, because I got to do adventure Westerns, and that's what I had planned to do from the start.

CBA: *Did you come up with samples for your own syndicated strip?*

Warren: Oh, constantly! In fact, I just sent one in last year, but none of them clicked, unfortunately. The very first one I did was called Drifting Sands, and it was to be a cowboy at the end of the Civil War, but he would not just be in the West. He would go overseas and all over Europe and Asia, etc. It was *Terry and the Pirates* in a Western setting, with a cowboy being the hero.

CBA: *Caniff was your artist hero at the time?*

Warren: Yes. Caniff, Kurtzman and Kubert are the three biggest influences on me.

CBA: *You were obviously looking at comic books?*

Warren: Oh, yeah, all the time. I loved all the comics. I wasn't interested in reading comics, or even comic strips, it was the artwork that I was basically interested in, and I'm not one of the cartoonists that rates Alex Raymond as one of my heroes. I consider him an illustrator, not a cartoonist. It's got to have that cartoony look to me to be pleasant, and all of the people I've mentioned have that.

CBA: *Do you recall being exposed to Kubert?*

Warren: I always liked him. I remember when I was a little kid, I'd seen his work in *Frontline Combat*, from EC's line, and I got into the war stuff. He did a comic strip *Tales of the Green Berets*, I thought that was magnificent. Then I started following him closely. Loved his *Tarzan*—I don't think anyone does a better Tarzan.

CBA: *As a professional, you were buying comics?*

Warren: Oh, yeah! The other guy is Alex Toth and his "Johnny Thunder." He was doing what I wanted to do when I was a kid.

CBA: *You mentioned Kurtzman. Did you have the opportunity to work with him?*

Warren: Yeah, on the early "Little Annie Fanny," the first one or two. He wanted me to work with him constantly, but I had to refuse, because like I said, I had a family, and *The Jackson Twins* was coming up, and at the same time he wanted me to work with him, so I figured *The Jackson Twins* was the regular pay, and Kurtzman is sporadic. I'd never know when he was going to do an "Annie Fanny," so I'd see him from time to time, I had some of my work published in *Help!* I wish I could've worked more with him, because I was a big fan of his.

CBA: *How did you meet him?*

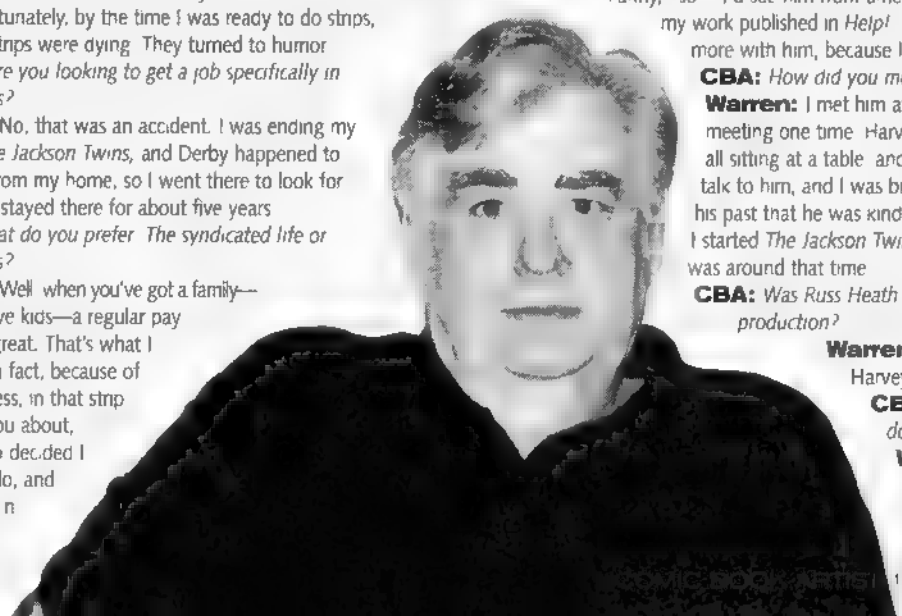
Warren: I met him at a Cartoonists' Society meeting one time. Harvey and his friends were all sitting at a table, and I just went over to talk to him, and I was bringing up so much of his past that he was kind of taken aback at that. I started *The Jackson Twins* around '62, so it was around that time.

CBA: *Was Russ Heath involved in the production?*

Warren: It was Will Eider, Harvey and myself.

CBA: *So you guys were doing it in New York?*

Warren: Well, that was another thing, the traveling was devastating. I'd go see



Right Inset: *A recent photo of Warren Sattler. We recently had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Sattler in person at a Big Apple comics show. Courtesy of Warren Sattler.*

him in Mount Vernon, where he lived, and then I'd have to deliver the work to Elder over in New Jersey, and then drive back to Connecticut. It was just too far!

CBA: *What, specifically, were you doing on the strip?*

Warren: I was tightening the pencils. It was roughed out, and there was not much backgrounds, so a lot of things, I would put in and Elder would paint it, and finish it up. I also had to put a fixative around the borders. . I don't know what it's called, it's kind of like a rubber cement you can wipe off after you did the picture, that kind of thing. I was being more of an assistant than anything else.

CBA: *Was the money good?*

Warren: I don't recall what it was. I think it was decent, yeah, but I don't recall.

CBA: Playboy *had a reputation of being very good paying. And you contributed to* Harvey's Help! *magazine, too. Were they gag strips?*

Warren: Whatever I thought of, I'd send him something, and if he could use it, he'd put it in.

CBA: *Did you continue to freelance? Before* National Lampoon, *did you contribute to* Mad *magazine, or did you try to?*

Warren: No, no. When I was working with somebody, I stayed pretty straight with them. Like with Charlton, I didn't look for other work, and when I was with *Cracked* magazine, I stayed with them also.

CBA: *Who was editing* Cracked?

Warren: Bob Sproul, I believe, from Florida. I never met anybody from *Cracked*, everything was done over the phone. I got the work, but I wasn't getting paid for three months! By the time I did get the check, it would all be going out with bills.

CBA: *What strips were you working on? Were they parodies?*

Warren: The typical stuff that was in *Cracked*. They'd send me a script, and I'd do it. . sometimes in strip form, sometimes in individual pictures, and mail them to a guy in New York who'd put them all together and put the lettering in.

CBA: *So, you started working on the syndicated strip,* The Jackson Twins?

Warren: No, there was one before that called *Barnaby*. I was still working at the Famous Artists' School, but doing that on the weekends. The strip was revived by Hall Syndicate in '60, and we did it for two years, and then Crocket Johnson decided to drop it. All he did was update the same story he originally did back in the '40s.

CBA: *Was this as a ghost, or did you get credit?*

Warren: No, I never got credit. I'm always a ghost.

CBA: *[laughs] Were you renowned for your mimicking style?*

Warren: Not at that time, no. Only with the *Lampoon* did I get that reputation, and then I got other parody books and magazine stuff from them. Through them, somebody would recommend me you'd have to go on staff.

CBA: *You were living in Connecticut at the time?*

Warren: Yeah, I've always lived here in Connecticut.

CBA: *So in Westport, did you go to the meetings for the cartoonists' groups?*

Warren: We used to meet over in Danbury, a bunch of cartoonists. Once in a while, I went down to Westport, though that was a little bit further for me to go.

CBA: *So you were involved in the community of cartoonists, and you were friends with . .?*

Warren: Yeah, I would say in the '80s that started. Basically, I didn't see much of anybody up here in Meriden. The luncheons were with Bob Weber, Jerry Marcus, Jack Bernl, Orlando Busimo, Joe Farris, Ron Goulart and a few others.

CBA: *So, all the time while you were doing your work, you were trying to pitch your own ideas, your own syndicated strips?*

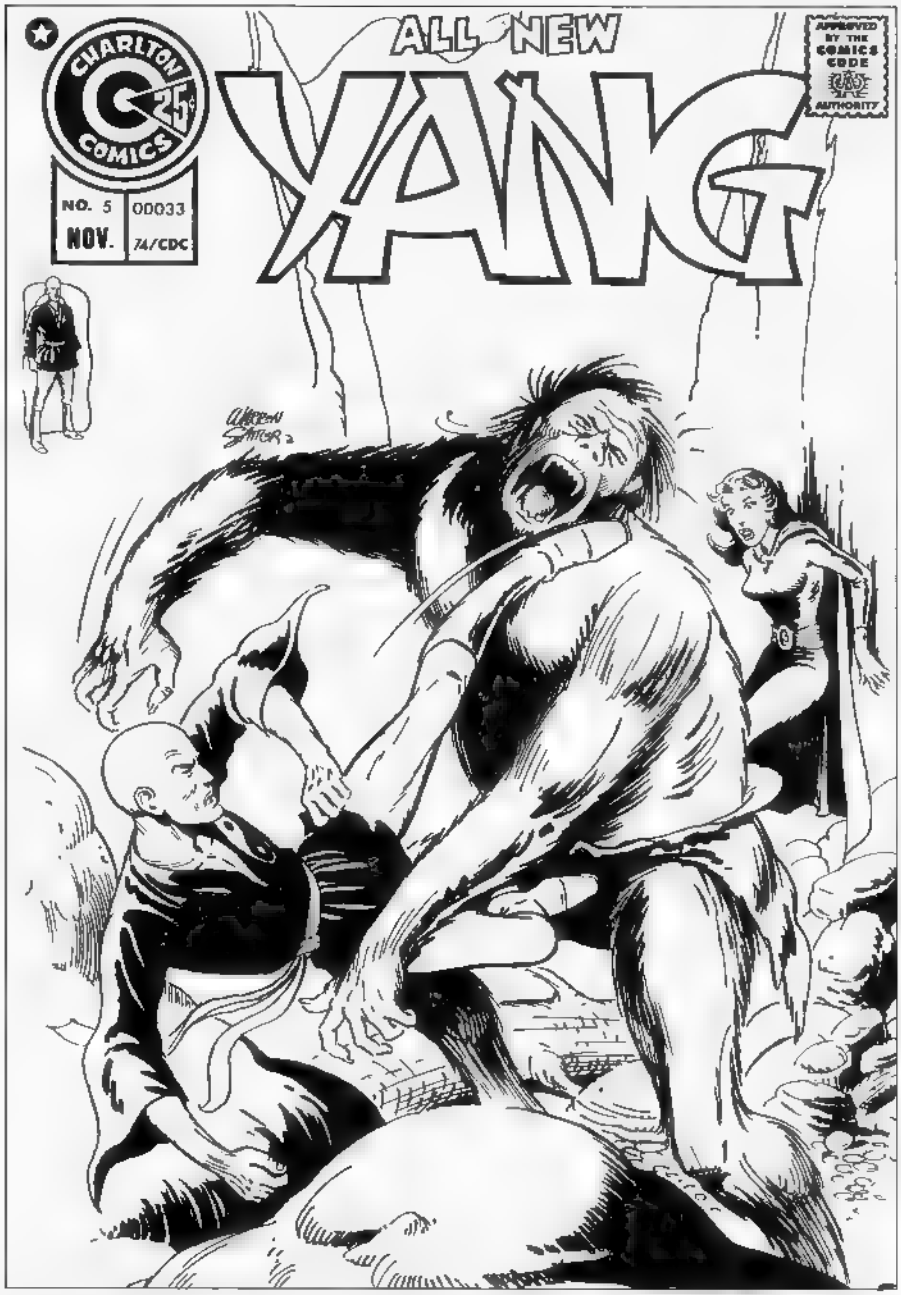
Warren: Yes. One started in '64 called *Grubby*, a little Western prospector character, still syndicated weekly by the Al Smith Feature Syndicate.

CBA: *Based on Gabby Hayes, pretty much?*

Warren: Yes, as a matter of fact it was! *[laughter]* In fact, if it was ever animated, I'd have liked to have cast that voice.

CBA: *That's fun stuff. How did you hook up with Dick Brooks to do* The Jackson Twins?

Warren: Riding home from probably that same meeting where I met Harvey Kurtzman, a bunch of cartoonists were riding back to Westport, and Dick happened to mention that he needed help on his strip because he was losing Ed Moore, who had been working with him. So, I said, "Yeah, I'd love to do it."



Above: *Warren's cover art to* Yang *#5. Courtesy of the artist. ©2001 the respective copyright holder.*

CBA: *How long did you stay with it?*

Warren: That was from 1962 to '72.

CBA: *Was the schedule fine with you?*

Warren: Well, I loved it. At first, I used to go down to Dick's place in Westport once every two weeks to pick up new work, and then he moved to Bermuda, and then to Switzerland, and I'd see him when he was on those jaunts only once a year, and I'd do all the product at home and mail it in.

CBA: *Was there also a Sunday strip?*

Warren: Yes.

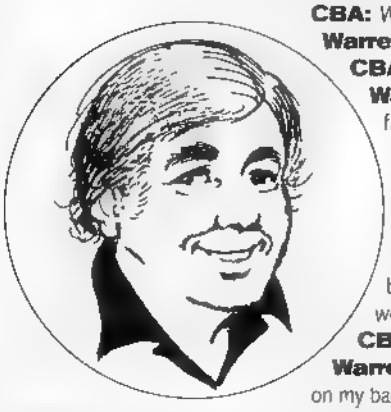
CBA: *How long did it take you to do a Sunday strip, typically?*

Warren: I always had weekends off, so I'd do all my work within the week, and get it out. I would work at night. I'd say I put in an eight hour day, but on the whole strip, you know? But I only worked five days.

CBA: *Typically, you also did freelance jobs, and whatever came along?*

Warren: Yeah, but not that much. I remember doing a whole Pocket Book in '69 while I was doing *The Jackson Twins*, with a guy named Paul Bernstein, and we'd put that together . that took about

Above: *Unpublished Billy the Kid sequence by Warren Art ©2001 Warren Sattler Billy the Kid ©2001 the respective copyright holder*



Above *Warren' self-portrait as it appears on his résumé ©2001 Warren Sattler*

a year to get out

CBA: *What was it?*

Warren: It was called *Great Moments in Hysteria*. A take-off on history. A lot of fun to do

CBA: *This was a paperback book you did straight illustration for?*

Warren: Humorous drawings. I'm also into Country-Western singing, and I'd be doing two or three nights out at nightclubs.

CBA: *Oh, yeah?*

Warren: Yes!

CBA: *What was the name of your band?*

Warren: We were called "Rawhide."

CBA: *Wow! You were the vocalist?*

Warren: Yeah. I made an album in Nashville, and that was fun. I wrote most of the songs

CBA: *By having a freelance life, and working at home and having five children, would you say you were more interactive with your children's lives than you would have otherwise been?*

Warren: Oh, yes constantly! If we wanted to go to the beach in the Summer, I'd just go, you know? And get the work done at night. That was the real fun of it, I loved it

CBA: *So, you remain close to your kids today?*

Warren: Oh, yeah. Very much so. Oh, I'd have them climbing on my back while I was drawing. The difficult time was when I was with *Lampoon*, because I had to draw a lot of raunchy stuff. [*laughter*] When they'd come in the room, I'd have to cover it up quickly.

CBA: *How did you fall into* National Lampoon?

Warren: A friend of mine named Randy Enos, who was working with them. I met Randy at the Famous Artists' School. He said, "Why don't you come down to the *Lampoon*? I think your work will be fine here." So I went down, met Michael Gross, and he accepted it

CBA: *Did you team-up with any particular writers, or was it just you'd get a script...?*

Warren: No, no whatever they sent me. By the way, they were bad spellers!

CBA: *Were they?*

Warren: They must've had spell check after, you know. [*laughter*]

CBA: *Did you have to correct the text?*

Warren: Well I didn't do it because all I did was the illustrations, I never put in any lettering in, unless it was an actual strip I was doing, then I would. But that would already be checked in advance.

CBA: *Were there a lot of changes with your art with* National Lampoon?

Warren: Hardly ever. The first job I think, when I did a Kennedy thing but I didn't get the face just right, and I had to do over the head. I don't remember their making any other changes.

CBA: *What was Michael Gross like?*

Warren: Oh, he was a very nice gentleman. They were all very polite, not wild in any way.

CBA: *Marvel Comics was a couple of floors below* National Lampoon, *and a freelancer would walk into* National Lampoon, *and it'd be all solemn and quiet, and then they'd go down to Marvel, and it was like a madhouse, everyone's jumping and running around, throwing paper airplanes and stuff. [laughter] You had in the bio you sent me that you worked for Marvel and DC.*

Warren: Yeah, and I didn't particularly like it, because it's a factory kind of thing. Of course, I wanted to work at home, I don't know what it's like in the offices then, I don't know what it's like now... but at the time I did it.

Somebody does penciling, somebody does inking, somebody does lettering, somebody does trees, somebody does this or that... I never liked that, I wanted to do it all. Charlton gave me that freedom... even writing, if I wanted to do it!

CBA: *Do you recall what work you did at Marvel?*

Warren: I only did one or two pieces, and they were humorous pieces. What I didn't like about it, they gave me a kind of a script outline, and I'd draw the picture and leave some space for balloons, but you'd never know where it was! They'd go over part of the picture when they finally put the words in, I never liked that. I was taught from Caniff that you do the lettering first, and then you can design whatever picture you want with the space that's left.

CBA: *So you didn't shine to the Marvel style.*

Warren: No. That's another thing everybody at that particular time had to draw like Jack Kirby and he's fine, but I didn't want to do it.

CBA: *Was there specific instruction to draw like Jack Kirby?*

Warren: No, no, I'd just notice that from looking at the comic books, I have no idea if that was policy or not. I don't think it's that way now, because when I do look at the books—I rarely look at comics now but when I did, it seems like they've got individual styles now.

CBA: *Do you recall what humor strips you were working on?*

Warren: No, I don't. Probably teen material. I can't recall, it's a long time ago and only did a few of them.

CBA: *And at DC?*

Warren: DC, I did a Western and a humorous thing. The one was called *Swing With Scooter*, and the Western was a cavalry thing in a war book that I did with Dick Ayers in the '70s.

CBA: *Did you work with Joe Orlando?*
Warren: He was the editor when I was doing the stuff
CBA: *By that short experience you had with Marvel and DC, you just generally not interested in the Big Two?*
Warren: Wel , DC wou d've been better because Joe Kubert was there and Wa ly Wood, and they were doing what they wanted, John Severin their styles were .. whatever they wanted to do If . wasn't work ng regularly with Charlton, I'd probably have pursued that. Then when Charlton ended, I went to *Cracked* and then final y got another strip which I'd wanted to do anyway. You re always at home, and you get it every single day, you knew what you have to do, you don t have to go out begg ng for work!
CBA: *What was your entreé into Charlton?*
Warren: When ended *The Jackson Twins* deal, . had to find work, and Derby, Connecticut, where Charlton was, was close by, so I went over there and talked to George Wi dman. He gave me a Nick Cuti script, a war script, and I d d it, and he said, "Yeah, go ahead," and he kept me there doing stuff I kept begging him for Western stuff, and that took a wh le Once I even wrote a story for *Haunted* a Western ghost story. Then George started liking my Westerns, so he gave me *Billy the Kid* and later on *Yang*
CBA: *So, you were pretty prolific with Charlton for a while?*
Warren: Oh, yeah, I had a lot of fun there They were very easy to work with, no changes. I worked mainly with Joe Gill, and Joe let you do anything. The thing is, he wrote for five panels all the time, and I would break it down to seven if I wanted to, or three, whatever I wanted as long as the story flowed. I would change the balloons if they were too wordy, add a ine or two here, and Joe never cared
CBA: *What was George Wildman like?*
Warren: He was very pleasant, a very nice gentleman
CBA: *Charlton had a reputation as paying the lowest page rate in the industry*
Warren: It d d
CBA: *But the trade off was the freedom?*
Warren: Yes. The comfort doing everything I did the letter ng, nk ng, penci l ng, and writing
CBA: *It was a complete package*
Warren: It was basica y doing my comic strip! [*laughter*] Halfway through my stay with them, they were making paintings on the cover, rather than nk outline and fi l in the colors, and that was fun too because loved to do watercolors, so I would paint the covers on *Billy the Kid* and *Yang*.
CBA: *Do you remember the genesis of Yang?*
Warren: Not really They were going to do "Wrong Country" with Sanho Kim, but the work got lost in the mail, or something happened. They wanted a Kung Fu type of book, and then Joe came up with Yang, and he called me up and said, "Draw this character." I designed Yang, but I had him with hair, and Joe said, "No, make him bald." That was the extent of the change That's a l I know, Joe did the writing
CBA: *And you did what, about eight issues of that?*
Warren: 13
CBA: *Did you work on* House of Yang, *too?*
Warren: I did two covers and one story for *House of Yang*
CBA: *During all this time, you were also working on* Billy the Kid?
Warren: Yeah
CBA: *And you were also working on a strip called "Powers"?*
Warren: Yeah, that was a three-page feature in a karate magazine, and it was a challenge, because there was a beginning, a middle and an end with a lot of action in between dealing with karate That lasted about five issues. It was a Charlton pub ication, but it was a karate magazine, not a comic t was just a cartoon feature
CBA: *You wrote and did the entire production on it?*
Warren: As luck would have it, my son was just learning karate at the time, so he helped me with a lot of the action sequences, te ling me, "No that s not how it's done."
CBA: *Did you just basically do your freelance work, and drive into Derby and deliver the job?*
Warren: I would get a new script usually through the mai , but would always deliver it in person
CBA: *Did you deal with Nick and George?*
Warren: Nick only at the beginning think Nick left, I think he went to DC He did more of the ghost stuff and the early war books when I was working on them I dealt mainly with George and Joe Gill

POWERS TREKS THROUGH THE STEAMING JUNGLE, BUT HIS QUARRY SPOTS HIM FIRST...
A TRAP IS SET AND POWERS IS ITS UN-WITTING VICTIM!
LATER..
YOU ARE YANKEE SPY, YES?
WRONG, YOKOTO... I'M A WR TER! THE WAR HAS BEEN OVER FOR THIRTY YEARS! JAPAN SURRENDERED IN 1945!
YOU LIE! I KILL YOU, YANKEE SPY!
ALTHOUGH HIS HANDS ARE TIED, POWERS, MASTER OF MARTIAL ARTS, IS ABLE TO DEFEND HIMSELF AGAINST YOKOTO!

Above: *Warren also did work for Charlton's regular magazine line as evidenced by this (and the CB Times piece on pg 20) page two of the three-page "Powers" adventure done for the martial arts magazine,* Defense Combat *©2001 the respective copyright holder*

CBA: *Do you recall what the layout of the place was like?*
Warren: As a matter of fact my eldest son, Steve, when he was 16, worked for a local access channel here n Meriden, and he f lmed a thing "How a comic book is made." He went down there, went through the whole plant everyth ng was done there! The coloring separations, artwork stones, and then t was even printed and shipped out from Derby There was a room full of women doing color separations
CBA: *Were you disappointed at all with the final product sometimes?*
Warren: Oh, that's the only th ng I didn't have a handle on! I could do al the other things like I told you, but the color.. their printing was not as neat as, say, DC I don't know what kind of process they used but if you look at it, you'll notice the dots are kind of weird. I wou d leave color notes in the margins, wh ch were always ignored
CBA: *Did you have to walk to a bowling alley to get to the editorial?*
Warren: They changed offices. The factory stayed at one place and then George went to another smaller office way down at the end I don't know if it was a bow ing alley between there or not, I can't recall, it was a long time ago But the first part, it was either above or alongside where all the print ng presses were It was a big

Above: *Warren Sattler pin-up contribution to* Charlton Bullseye *#3, the "Special Kung Fu Issue," illustrating Roger Stern's article, "There Be Dragons in Derby!" Courtesy of Bob Layton & CPL/Gang Productions. Characters ©2001 the respective copyright holder*

factory! Not where George was, they were glass partitioned offices at that time, at the beginning, and later on, it was just a small office where George and Joe Gill would work

CBA: *So Joe Gill, as far as you know, came in the office and was working in the office?*

Warren: He was always there, so I take it he worked right from the Charlton building.

CBA: *Did you socialize with any other freelancers from Charlton?*

Warren: No, I never met another single artist from there. A lot of them were mailing it in, also. I just read an article about Pat Boyette who died recently, and he was down in Texas, so I know he wasn't coming up! Alex Toth did some work for them, but he was out in California.

CBA: *So, how would you assess your career at Charlton? Was it fun?*

Warren: Oh, yeah. Like I said, it was the best time, especially when I was doing the Western things. It was ideal, because that was exactly what I always wanted to do.

CBA: *If you didn't have that enthusiasm for the material that you were working on, would you have stayed? Could you not have made better money working more in advertising or elsewhere?*

Warren: I always liked the comics. I didn't want to go into advertising. I did advertising on the side with various groups, but comics were what I wanted to do, and like I told you, I didn't want to be a factory type artist at Marvel, where you're just doing the inks or the pencils, that's no fun at all. I wanted to be in charge of everything.

CBA: *When you were working as a freelancer, were you working pretty steady with* National Lampoon?

Warren: Yes, that was probably from '73 to '80 that I worked with them. I was also working on *Cracked* at the same time.

CBA: *You sent me an unpublished drawing from 1996 of a Western character.*

Warren: I was just testing out my eyesight then. I had an operation on my eyes, and I think that was one of the first things I drew.

CBA: *Is he a character with a name?*

Warren: Oh, no. I was just doing a Western guy. I doodle constantly.

CBA: *You also sent me something from* CB Times?

Warren: Yeah, that was a short-lived book. When that was the craze, Charlton decided to capitalize on it, and George gave me the first story, which he wrote. There's a picture down in the corner there of George himself.

CBA: *I talked to Dick Giordano, and he says he was in Miami, and he was walking down near the beach, and who does he bump into right in front of him, but George Wildman. [laughs] Do you draw anymore?*

Warren: Very rarely. The last kind of stuff I was doing was working with Jerry DeFuccio out of New Jersey. Again, I never met Jerry personally, just on the phone. He worked with *Cracked* for a while, and fell in love with my work, and he got in touch with me, so I've been doing occasional work with him. That's about it.

CBA: *So, you're officially in retirement now?*

Warren: More or less. I do an occasional piece here and there, but not much. My two strips, *Grubby* and *Swamp Brats*, are still being published, but they're reprints. My wife died in '92, and after that, I decided not to draw that anymore. The syndicate asked me if they could still publish it, those are weekly strips.

CBA: *They're weekly strips?*

Warren: Every Thursday it'd come out.

CBA: *Oh, these are for the weekly town newspapers. Do you have any idea what kind of circulation they have?*

Warren: Very small now, I think it's down to about 15 newspapers, but I originally had about 100 when I was working.

CBA: *Does it count for any significant income at all?*

Warren: No. No, not at all. It never did.

CBA: *Pardon my ignorance about* The Jackson Twins, *but was this in Dick Brook's style, and you were adapting to it?*

Warren: No, not really. Dick would do the lettering and the faces of the main characters. But Dick's style was very simplistic, and I'd do all the rest. I'd change it... there was a time I was interested in one artist, and I'd lean that way, and then lean another way. It changed slightly throughout the years.

CBA: *Heavy use of black ink.*

Warren: Oh, yeah, that's the Caniff influence.

CBA: *And you worked on* Hi and Lois?

Warren: I was basically working with Frank Johnson on *Bringing Up Father*, the old Jiggs and Maggie comic strip. Frank also did inking on *Hi and Lois*, and when Chance Browne would take periodic vacations, I'd do the penciling for it, and Frank would finish it.

CBA: *How would you assess the differences and the similarities between doing a syndicated strip and doing comics?*

Warren: Well... basically, it's the same thing. There were deadlines even with the comic books, and if you look at almost all of them, when I did entire books, the last few pages were rushed because basically the first part was where I put my heart and soul. That was because I was pushing the deadlines.

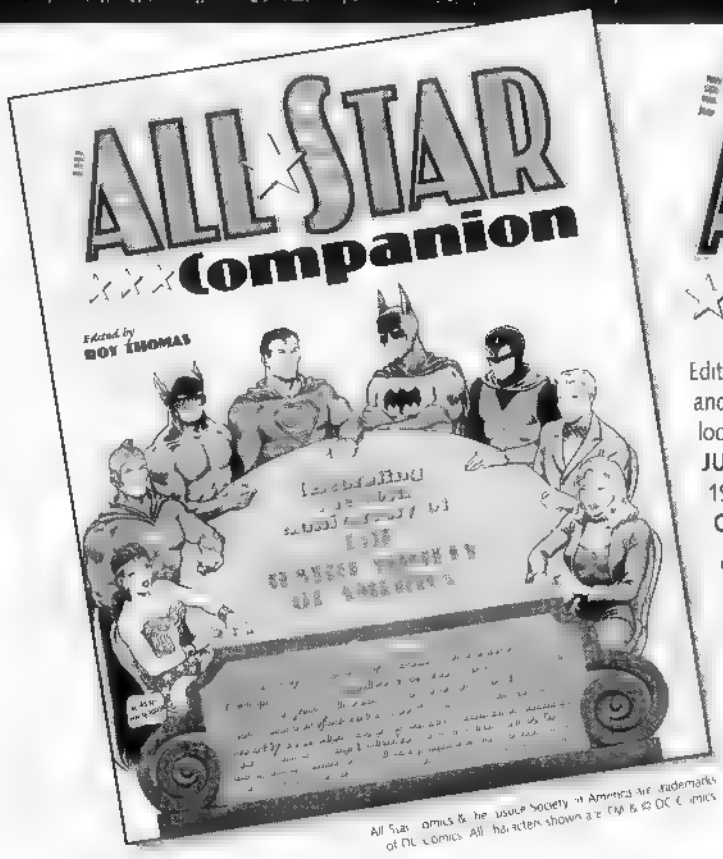
CBA: *If you could, would you have liked to have done more comic book work?*

Warren: If I could have done a Western ... but that's dead now, I don't think there's a Western comic being published. There may be, but I don't think so. And the super-hero stuff, I was never interested in.

CBA: *So you never got any of your artwork back from Charlton?*

Warren: Never. The only people that ever sent work back to me were, of course, syndication, and *National Lampoon*.

ROY THOMAS' UNPRECEDENTED LOOK AT THE JUSTICE SOCIETY OF AMERICA!



THE ALL-STAR Companion

Editor **ROY THOMAS**, internationally known as a major writer and editor for Marvel and DC Comics, has assembled **THE ALL-STAR COMPANION**, the most thorough look ever taken at **ALL-STAR COMICS**! Drawing on his lifelong passion for **THE JUSTICE SOCIETY OF AMERICA**, he traces its origin from its beginnings in the 1940s, through its rebirth in the 1960s, the 1970s resurrection of **ALL-STAR COMICS**, and beyond, including

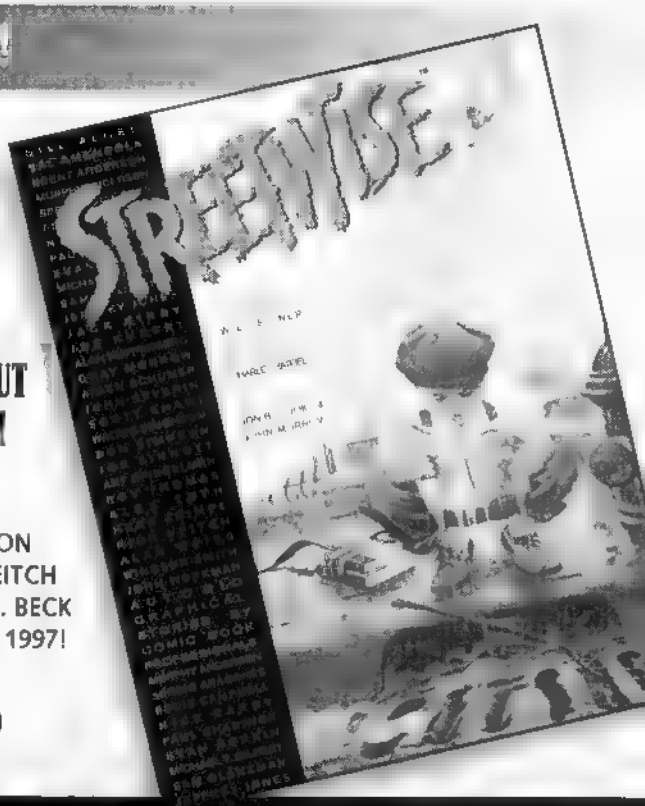
- Issue-by-issue coverage of **ALL-STAR COMICS #1–57!**
- The original **JLA–JSA TEAMUPS** & the **'70s ALL-STAR REVIVAL!**
- Art from an **UNPUBLISHED 1945 JSA STORY!**
- An examination of the **FOUR "LOST" ALL-STAR COMICS ISSUES!**
- **RARE ART** by **JACK BURNLEY, DICK DILLIN, MICHAEL T. GILBERT, IRWIN HASEN, ADAM HUGHES, CARMINE INFANTINO, GIL KANE, JACK KIRBY, JOE KUBERT, SHELDON MOLDOFF, MART NODELL, JERRY ORDWAY, ALEX ROSS, WALLY WOOD** and more!!

208-PAGE TRADE PAPERBACK NOW SHIPPING! COVERS BY MURPHY ANDERSON!
$24 POSTPAID (CANADA: $26, ELSEWHERE: $27 SURFACE, $31 AIRMAIL)

KIRBY, WINDSOR-SMITH, DORKIN, & MORE!

STREETWISE™

TOP ARTISTS DRAWING STORIES ABOUT THEIR LIVES!



AN UNPRECEDENTED ASSEMBLY OF TALENT:

JACK KIRBY • SERGIO ARAGONÉS • WALTER SIMONSON • BRENT ANDERSON
ROY THOMAS & JOHN SEVERIN • NICK CARDY • PAUL CHADWICK • RICK VEITCH
MURPHY ANDERSON • JOE KUBERT • EVAN DORKIN • SAM GLANZMAN • C.C. BECK
ART SPIEGELMAN • PLUS BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH'S FIRST NEW STORY SINCE 1997!
COVER BY STEVE RUDE • FOREWORD BY WILL EISNER

160-PAGE TRADE PAPERBACK • $24 POSTPAID
(CANADA: $26, ELSEWHERE: $27 SURFACE, $31 AIRMAIL)

TwoMorrows. Bringing New Life To Comics Fandom. VISA MasterCard

TwoMorrows Publishing • 1812 Park Dr. • Raleigh, NC 27605 USA • 919-833-6092 • FAX: 919-833-8023 • e-mail: twomorrow@aol.com • www.twomorrows.com

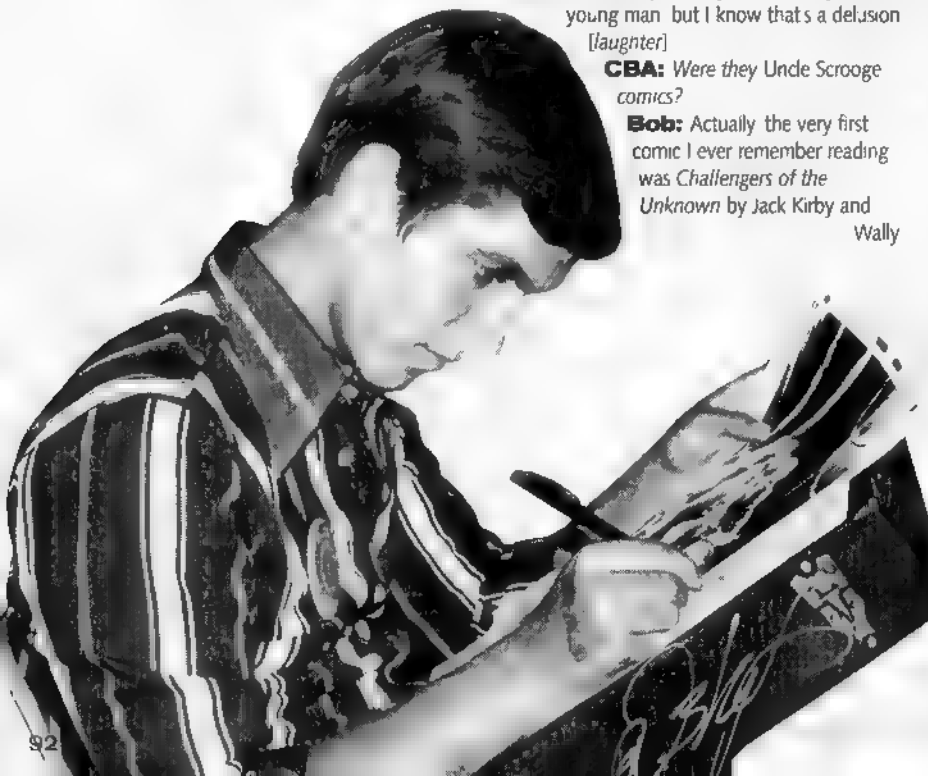
Layton and the CPL/Gangsters

On the days of *Charlton Bullseye* & breaking into comics

Conducted by Jon B. Cooke
Transcribed by Jon B. Knutson

Bob Layton, in the simplest of terms, is a jack of all trades—penciler, inker, writer, editor, studio head, idea guy, and production manager all rolled into one. Perhaps best recalled for his slammin' Iron Man concepts over the years, not to mention his innovative Doctor Tomorrow retro series of a few years ago, Bob is still at it, busily making the best of this ailing industry. Recently, Bob and Dick Giordano worked together on the Charlton Action Hero revival, The L.A.W., which Layton scripted. Special thanks to Bob for loan of his treasured CPLs, Charlton Portfolio, Charlton Bullseyes, and witzends, and for permission to reprint material from various issues therein, which significantly livened up these two Charlton issues. This interview, conducted by phone on March 25, 2000, was copyedited by Bob

Comic Book Artist: *So, where are you from, Bob?*
Bob Layton: Originally, Indianapolis, Indiana. I was born and raised in the city there.
CBA: *When did you get interested in comic books?*
Bob: Actually, I don't remember ever *not* being interested. I learned to read off of comics before I started school. My sisters—I had two older sisters who were very attentive. And I loved the pictures... and the fact of the continuity of the pictures. Now, the pictures were enough to make you understand what was basically happening, and my sisters would read me the dialogue and stuff, and that actually put the hook in me then. Because I was four years old and I was just amazed that people actually drew these things.
CBA: *What year were you born?*
Bob: '53. Do we want to tell the readers? *[laughs]*
CBA: *That's your call, pal!* [laughter] *Just to put this in context.*
Bob: I'm sorry, I always think of myself as a young man, but I know that's a delusion. *[laughter]*
CBA: *Were they* Uncle Scrooge *comics?*
Bob: Actually, the very first comic I ever remember reading was *Challengers of the Unknown* by Jack Kirby and Wally Wood. And you can imagine how I was when I actually got a chance to work with Wally Wood! Consider the fact that he universally molded my future.
CBA: *So, from Indianapolis, were you involved in early fandom at all?*
Bob: In fact, it's so funny: I just read an article today in which Steven Grant was talking about the fan days of we Indiana folk in his online column. Once I got out of high school in Indianapolis, I kept doing a lot of odd jobs while working on my drawing and stuff like that, putting together a little portfolio to get into comics. I had a pretty large collection, and I sold comics through *The Comic Buyer's Guide*—you know, just basically the same kind of trip like other fans at the time. I started buying fanzines, and really got fascinated with self-publishing, and started putting together a small little magazine called *Contemporary Pictorial Literature*, which basically was reviews and insights from fans saying positive stuff about comics. It just kind of snowballed, I hooked up with another Indianapolis resident named Roger Stern, and this little publication started picking up people. Stern had his satellite of friends, and I had my little satellite of friends, and before you knew it, we were putting out this bi-monthly digest-sized magazine that really had a pretty decent following at the time.
CBA: *What was the circulation at its height?*
Bob: At the time, I think we were doing 5,000-6,000 copies a month, which—
CBA: *Whoa!*
Bob: ...yeah, there wasn't any real fandom to speak of, it was pretty amazing. I can't say we sold every copy. *[laughter]* We were giving a hell of a lot of them away. And I think that's one of the things that got our foot in the door in terms of our professional work, was the fact that we would send volumes of these things to Marvel and DC and Charlton, just trying to solicit some interest in what we were doing, and giving a place to showcase fan art—good fan art. Probably, at that time, we had the best fan artist that existed, John Byrne!
CBA: *How did you guys split up the responsibilities? Did you alternate layout, or was it split down the middle?*
Bob: On publishing the fanzine, originally, I was pretty much putting the book together. Roger took care of a lot of the editorial content, and I made the phone calls, did the legwork, and organized these stapling parties *[laughter]* on my living room floor! You know, get the guys over and collate all the stuff. At that time, getting stuff printed off set was really difficult. Today's Xerox machines didn't really exist, so it was a lot harder, and a lot more expensive to put together a fanzine.
CBA: *But you hand-collated* thousands *of copies?*
Bob: *[laughs]* Like I said, I'm probably exaggerating those numbers somewhat. I think by the end we were getting around 5,000, so the beginning was much smaller than that. You've got to remember you're asking me to go back and remember things from 26, 27 years ago! *[laughs]* Can any of us do that with total clarity? So, if I get anything wrong, and if I leave anything out, to John, Roger or any of the other guys that were there, I apologize. *[laughter]*
CBA: *So, you advertised selling it through* The Buyer's Guide?
Bob: Yeah, The *Comics Buyer's Guide* was basically the main venue... You've got to remember, not much existed. What was really cool was we had an East Coast clique, and a Midwest clique. There was the guys on the East Coast which published *Etcetera*, which I think was Carl Gafford and Paul Levitz, and I think Paul Kupperberg and a bunch of others. They pretty much put out a fanzine very similar to ours... actually, I think they came first. But there



Below: *Sam Maronie photograph of a young Charlton-era Bob Layton, catching up on some free-lance while at a comics show. Courtesy and ©2001 Sam Maronie. Used with permission.*

was a nice, sort of friendly rivalry going on with those guys.

CBA: *And you had a lot of art coming in through the mail?*

Bob: Yeah what was interesting was, everybody knew somebody else. Also, in those days, we were very upbeat about comics. *[laughs]* We all saw a really bright, rosy future, and we loved what was being done At that time, comics were really just starting to get into that second generation of artists and it was a very exciting time, and we were right there, man! We actually knew some of those people from Midwestern connections, like Dan Adkins' clique over there in Youngstown, and we made a few little CPL/Gang roadtrips over there to hang out with those guys, take apart their files, try to steal artwork from them. *[laughter]*

CBA: *And you went to the Detroit shows?*

Bob: Yeah, we went to the Detroit Triple Fan Fair shows—and those were great shows for their time We went there promoting what we're doing, and just having fun! Everybody was having a blast, and everyone had a connection with somebody else, so we had a lot of great up-and-coming guys doing fanzine artwork for us. There was John Byrne, Bob Hall did some stuff for us, we published some of Craig Russell's really early stuff Paul Gulacy did some stuff for us... I think they were just breaking into comics at the time, and we were getting material from them, as well Also what happened was, as we started going along, we began getting a lot of unsolicited material from professionals who were really enjoying it! They were doing drawings for us, and sent it along, so it was an interesting mix of fan art and good solid professional work.

CBA: *Do you recall when John Byrne first contacted you?*

Bob: He didn't contact me. I think Roger contacted him through a connection, a mutual friend. John had done work for various fanzines he was also doing commercial art in Calgary and he'd already been doing stuff for the magazine for a year or so before we actually ever met! *[laughs]* We finally connected at a con or something Roger pretty much was the liaison with John, and John was so busy—as he's said—trying to make a living and break into comics at the same time Of course, I was trying to do the same!

CBA: *Who was Duffy Vohland?*

Bob: Duffy Vohland was a mutual friend another Hoosier—and I don't want to get into the Hoosier jokes, as I didn't particularly care for life in Indiana the way some people did *[laughter]* Duffy was a mutual friend, a very peculiar fellow, but very lovable though He was one of those kind of guys, I guess you'd call a "noodge," and he had an incredible list of names of people, and people who knew people, and blah, blah, blah , and Duffy was always one of those guys who could get on the phone. . and he did whatever it was. He'd have hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of phone bills, calling people up, trying to find out information or what was going on, see if he could finagle work out of them, and things like that. Duffy was a fledgling training to work in comics, and eventually he moved to New York, and started to work for Marvel in their bullpen I think he was also putting together *FOOM* magazine for a while Duffy would send us inside information, occasionally finagle somebody out of a piece of artwork to send to us. So he was our contact there Duffy was really the one who got us connected with Charlton.

CBA: *What happened to Duffy?*

Bob: I lost contact with Duffy years after getting into comics, except occasionally Duffy's departed, now He's no longer with us. What exactly happened, I don't know. You'd have to talk to Roger or John about that. I wasn't that close with Duffy He was a lovable guy, but he was also kind of a screw-up, *[laughs]* and he had the ability to piss *all* his friends off at one time or another So it was one of those things you loved him and hated him at the same time

CBA: *[laughs] Like half the people in comics*

Bob: Yeah, right! Comic book people are notorious for being unreliable, and I think he could qualify as that Sincere! Totally sincere I don't think he had an evil bone in his body, but he was just a bit of a slacker at times

CBA: *Did you clue into the Charlton comics at all during Dick's tenure there?*

Bob: Oh! I was an absolute huge fan of the Charlton stuff! So when Duffy called us... if I remember how the call came, this was in the early 70s about '74, I think Stern gave us a call from Duffy saying that I should talk to somebody up at Charlton, and how would we like to publish the unpublished material they had leftover from the Dick Giordano days. And of course, we lost our minds! Even at the possibility of it! I saw a lot of promises in those characters when I first read them Captain Atom was one I remember distinctly, just loving Ditko's art. It was a nice alternative to the stuff that was out there You always kind of thought that more would happen with it, and it didn't. I was always kind of disappointed, it never really had a chance to go where it was supposed to go Also, I was a huge fan of *Sarge Steel*, and I think that's where my connection with Dick Giordano came in, because just thought he was a tremendous illustrator, I loved his style, it was a huge influence on me as a fledgling inker I wanted to grow up to be Dick Giordano!

CBA: *What was it about* Sarge Steel *that you clued into the art?*

Bob: The art was amazing, and his ability to draw women, of course, has always been renowned, and the girls are always incredibly sexy in there, but there was a nice sort of slickness to what he did, you

Above: *They may have lost an arm and a leg on the job, but CPL/Gang did a great job with their first project on the small publishing company, The Charlton Portfolio produced on coated stock and sportin' this sweet Don Newton cover Courtesy of Bob Layton & CPL/Gang Productions Characters ©2001 their respective copyright holders*

Above: *Originally a letter column header for CPL, Charlton Bullseye appropriated this Byrne-drawn Rog-2000 image for their own use Minimal problem considering both had the same editor Bob Layton! Courtesy of Bob Layton & CPL/Gang Productions. Rog-2000 ©2001 the respective copyright holder*

Below: CPL -Contemporary Pictorial Literature—was a highly regarded fanzine (boardering on prozine considering the professional contributions in any given issue) of its day. At left, John Byrne's depiction of Scott Free for CPL #8. At right, P. Craig Russell shares his version of Dr. Stephen Strange for CPL #7. Courtesy of Bob Layton & CPL/Gang Productions. Mister Miracle ©2001 DC Comics. Dr. Strange ©2001 Marvel Characters, Inc.

know, that really found fascinating. It's hard to tell you... why does a song click in your head? You don't really know. All I knew is I looked at that stuff and it talked to me, and I said, "Well, that's the kind of stuff I want to do." And the fact that he was putting his heart and soul into something that was not really a super-hero, which I thought was kind of neat.

CBA: *Did you think when the proposal came from Charlton to do a fanzine, was that because simultaneously,* Amazing World of DC Comics *and* FOOM *were coming out?*

Bob: That was exactly part of the thing... the evolution of the *Charlton Bullseye* was a little slower than that. Originally we just made a deal with Charlton where we could use this material, one time they had an unpublished Blue Beetle story, fully done by Steve Ditko, originally slated for *Blue Beetle* #6, so I forget how Duffy finagled the deal with them or whatever, but we got it pretty much with no strings attached.

CBA: *Free.*

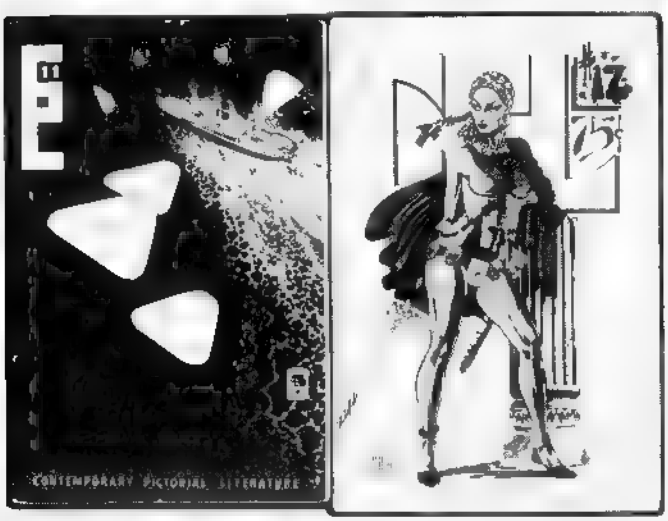
Bob: Yeah, pretty much! It was like, "Can we use this?" I mean, they had the stuff sitting around on big old metal shelves in the back room of the bowling alley there, for a decade or better! They had no use for it! It never occurred to them to actually publish it themselves, you know? It was kind of like, "What harm would it do?" They were trying to relaunch the Charlton characters, they felt that any sort of attention they got was good.

CBA: *Was this George Wildman?*

Bob: George Wildman and Nick Cuti, yeah. George was the editor in-chief at the time, Nick was his assistant, and... Dick did most of the legwork and stuff like that, but the point of it is, they were really trying to relaunch the Charlton line with *E-Man* and *Yang* and those kind of things, and I'm presuming they felt that any attention they got at the time would be good. We promised to be real nice and all that kind of stuff. It was a one-time thing that we put together this *Charlton Portfolio*. So, we really weren't looking ahead to doing anything else at the time, it was just kind of interesting, try to do a bigger, slicker thing than we did with the usual bi-monthly *CPL* magazine.

CBA: *So, George really had his eye on marketing, and really, like you said, relaunching the line. He seemed real sharp with that. I remember as a kid, just thinking, "Oh, things are happening at Charlton suddenly!"*

Below: *Even masters such as Alex Toth contributed to the Layton-edited 'zine. At left, Toth's astonishing cover for CPL #11. At right, this Paul Gulacy cover or #12 was printed in full color. Courtesy of Bob Layton & CPL/Gang Productions. Art ©2001 the respective artists.*



Bob: Well, I think part of it, too, is basically... Nick was a frustrated illustrator, and he had a long association with Wally Wood, as well, and I think Nick really appreciated young talent, and the fact that they were going to do something. Marvel had a second generation of artists coming in, the Howard Chaykins, Walt Simonsons, Jim Starlins, Paul Gulacys, and I think Charlton really had an eye to, "Well, there are young guys out there that are basically up-and-coming that could bring some life and energy to this company. Give it some attention." I think that was part of it.

CBA: *The fan response to* E-Man *was very positive, it was the number one subscription magazine that Charlton had, and yet, it was allegedly the lowest-selling Charlton comic on the stands.*

Bob: I'll never quite understand that, but then again, good old E-Man is the character that refuses to go quietly into the night; he wound up popping up in one incarnation or another, at one comic book company or another, for another decade. Part of the problem, I think, too, is that they had quality control problems at Charlton... they didn't have the best presses in the world and that sort of thing. But there was such a boom going on in the comic book industry at the time, I think it just got buried. Also, I don't think the distribution was really too hot, either. They didn't really get out on the stands the way the other books did.

CBA: *Extremely erratic distribution.*

Bob: Yeah, extremely erratic, and I think that was part of the problem, as well, why they didn't survive. I mean, I think George and Nick really kind of brought a new energy to a place that had pretty much been dormant for a decade. Dick had left, and I've got to say they gave it the good old college try. They were very, very good to us.

CBA: *And you were right on the coat-tails of that, with the* Portfolio.

Bob: Actually, I think part of it was just being in the right place at the right time, because they were pressed enough with the *Portfolio* —although it didn't do very well, I mean, we lost our shirts money-wise.

CBA: *Well, you spent a lot in production, you've got glossy paper.*

Bob: Right, and at the time, it was real expensive, and it was a huge financial loss. But there's a silver lining to all that, you know, in the sense that Charlton came back, very impressed with the effort we'd tried to do, and also it was the time of fanzines, the other companies had discovered there was a market out there for fan magazines, and you had *The Amazing World of DC Comics*, as you mentioned, and Marvel had their *FOOM* magazine at the time, and both of them were doing fairly well, I understand. I think it was George Wildman who said, "I'd like to have something like this." Something where the fans could get updates on what they were doing, and just generate some excitement. Again, I can't remember the exact way it all came out. I had probably very little to do with the actual thing. Stern remembers everything, he's one of those guys that pretty much can give you word-by-word conversations that we had at a convention with somebody 25 years ago. I'm not that good at it; to me, it was all one big blur. [*laughter*] A fun blur, I remember it was all fun! A lot of hard work, a lot of fun, but basically, a big blur. I'm just going to give you the highlights, what I recall. Besides, I don't think it's really a matter of giving credit to people, I know we all did a lot of hard work on it. I was pretty much in charge of putting the magazine together, getting all the illustrations together, justifying all those friggin' columns.

CBA: *On the typewriter?*

Bob: Yeah. Originally on typewriter, and then we went to typeset, finally, because it was just like murder, so we decided to spend the extra money. Here's the deal, and I think this was probably unprecedented at the time. Okay, we had lost our shirts on the *Charlton Portfolio*, so I wasn't really sure about how to do this thing. We put the first magazine together, and we had... I think our first entry was a Captain Atom story that was just in pencil form, penciled by Steve Ditko for the last issue of *Captain Atom* that was never published, and it was working off of David Kaler's plot, who was the original writer. Stern and Byrne finished the job, and Leslie published it as a two-parter in the first and second issues. We had gotten the first issue out and I think I was at the New York convention... I can't remember which convention this was, but I wound up with Phil Seuling, and at the time, he and Bud Plant were really just starting to get the direct market thing together, and Phil made a deal with me that he and Bud would put the money up front, and buy X-amount of copies, and pay up front, that would help me finance the issues. So before I went to press, I let them know how many copies that we expected to print, how many they would buy, and I'd bill them in advance, basically, and use the money to publish the book. So, we really didn't have to worry at that point about sales too terribly much, they were pretty much in charge of selling the magazine, it was just get the money, publish the

thing, ship it off to them. So, it started working out pretty well, and it took off from there, with Phil and Bud, who were great guys, and savvy businessmen, and they were pretty much able to sell the magazine for us.

CBA: *They subsidized your production costs?*

Bob: Basically, they just ordered in advance, they paid in advance of publication.

CBA: *That's exceptionally supportive!*

Bob: Oh, I'm telling you, but they really believed in it, they felt we were all really talented guys. I mean, Phil always thought we were all going to end up doing something substantial in the business, bless his soul, and I'd like to think he was right, I'd like to think that we had.

CBA: *Well, you had an effect on the industry!*

Bob: Well, I would say John and Roger and a lot of the other guys did, too. I'm staying humble, that's all! *[laughter]*

CBA: *Let me fill it up!*

Bob: Damn, Jon, let me at least *pretend* to be humble! *[laughter]* No, Phil was really convinced that we were doing a good thing. I think he was a fan of the old Charlton stuff, I think he had a very friendly relationship with Dick Giordano, and to him it was very nostalgic, and at the same time, he was really big on supporting young, up-and-coming entrepreneurs.

CBA: *Obviously, from looking at these productions, you were very ambitious guys!*

Bob: Well, it's 1974, you know? Well, color covers and stuff was tough, but we were publishing mainstream stuff at the fanzine level, and soliciting and getting contributions from—at the time—the deans of the business! If you look at *FOOM* and *Amazing World*, they were pretty static magazines, pretty much limited to just fan art and stuff like that, they weren't terribly slick publications. DC's was slick, but it was like reading the *Congressional Record*, and Marvel's was a little more fun, but very kind of crude-looking. We really tried to do something that was highly entertaining and slick, something that would really draw attention to Charlton. We would swap ads, the deal we'd made with George was we'd run subscription ads in *Charlton Bullseye*, and he would run ads for *Charlton Bullseye* in the comics. So, we'd cross-promote the thing. It was a good thing, it worked out well for us.

CBA: *What kind of numbers?*

Bob: Again, it was in the 4,000-5,000 copy range.

CBA: *With the second issue, you immediately went to color covers.*

Bob: Yes, we had some suggestions, and I think that was one of the thing that Phil suggested. You see, after the first issue, there was a big change and I attribute that entirely to Phil and Bud, who basically said, "You've got a good thing going here, but you need to spend money to make money, you need things a little bigger, blah, blah, blah, blah. . ." So, you see with the second issue, it was type-set, full color covers, the whole nine yards. And they were right! I mean that second issue is so rare now, so hard to find, I mean, that one copy is all I have that I've sent you, and I've never seen another copy out there.

CBA: *The magazine lasted for a period of time—what, a year and a-half, two years?*

Bob: Well, it was bi-monthly, so it lasted a little over a year. It didn't really fade—what happened was, we all went pro! *[laughter]* It was like, "Who wants to publish fanzines when we could be doing comic books?" *[laughter]* I mean, John went first. John was already working at Charlton, he was just getting his foot in at Marvel.

CBA: *When John went over to Marvel, was that as a direct result of his connections with you guys?*

Bob: Well, all I can say to that—I mean, I don't want to contradict anything John has said, but all I know is, his first series at Charlton was "Rog-2000," which was the mascot character of *CPL*. So, Nick Cuti loved Rog-2000, the character we had as the little mascot in all the issues, and he suggested doing it as a back-up in *E-Man!* He said, "It's a nice character, you've got to write stories for this character." I think originally, he'd planned for Joe Staton to draw the thing, and I think after some phone calls from Rog and the gang basically pleading for him to use John—I mean, John's the guy who originated the character, let John do it!—Nick said, "Okay, makes sense." And the rest is history.

CBA: *And George really clued into John's work immediately, I hear.*

Bob: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, he thought John was God's gift. He's got the chops, yeah. What John lacked at the time in skill, he immediately made up with enthusiasm; nobody cared more about what they were doing.

CBA: *Doomsday +1 was a revelation for a Charlton book—it was a wonderful bringing-together of a Neal Adams and a very cartoony style all at once, and it was just delightful.*

Bob: John brought so much energy to that, and I know he contributed a lot, story-wise, too. He would basically get the story, and he'd add his "Byrne-isms" to it. *[laughter]*

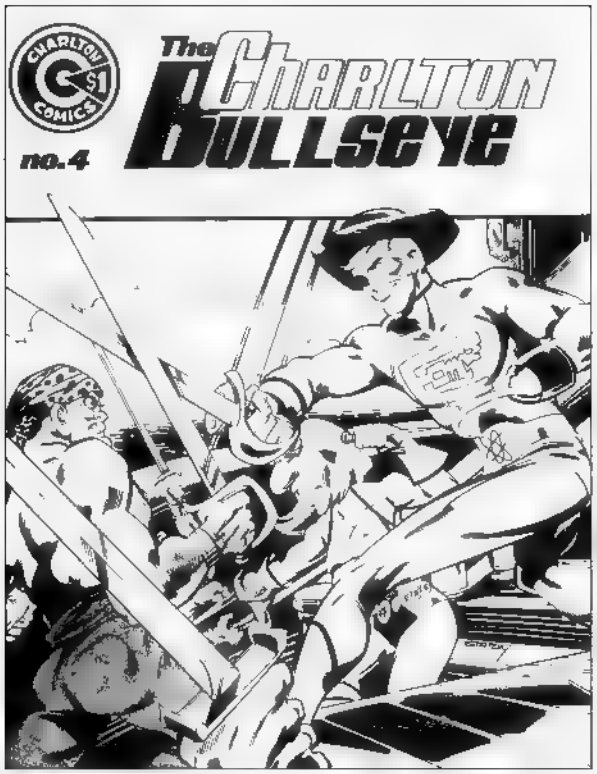
CBA: *"Byrne Robotics." [laughs]*

Bob: In terms of useful enthusiasm, you just couldn't beat that, it was in every page that John was doing. Like I said, his career at Charlton was short.

Above: *Al Milgrom's CB #1 cover with Captain Atom vs. The Ghost. Courtesy of Bob Layton & CPL/Gang Productions. Characters ©2001 DC Comics.*

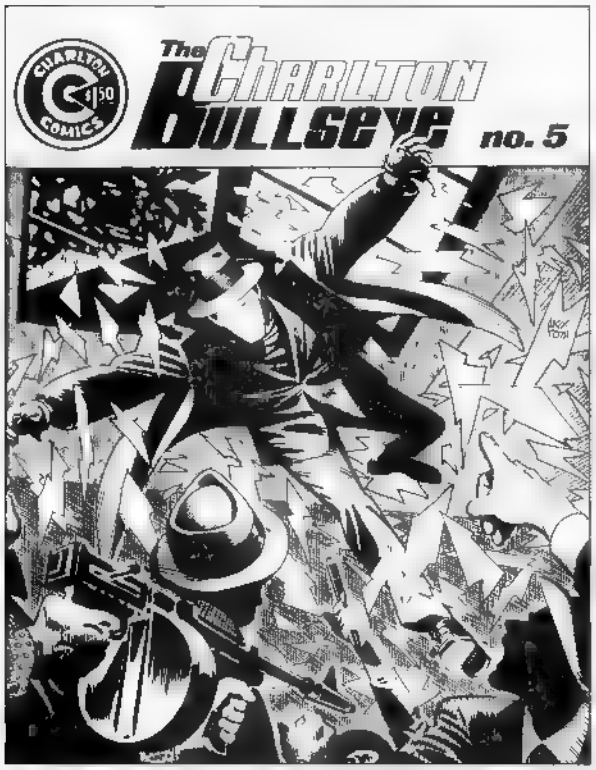
Left inset: *Joe Staton's cover to #2 featuring E-Man and Nova. Courtesy of Bob Layton & CPL/Gang Productions.*

Below: *Frank McLaughlin returns to his creation, Judomaster, on his cover for #3. Courtesy of Bob Layton & CPL/Gang Productions. Judomaster ©2001 DC Comics.*



Above: *Joe Staton's return engagement as cover artist on #4 Courtesy of Bob Layton & CPL/Gang Productions. Characters ©2001 Joe Staton*

Below: *Alex Toth poses The Question on his cover for #5, the last issue Courtesy of Bob Layton & CPL/Gang Productions. The Question ©2001 DC Comics*



but memorable! It didn't take him long to get noticed at that point.

CBA: *Did you have personal dealings at all with Steve Ditko?*

Bob: No, the Ditko material was all just sitting in inventory. There was... I never had any dealings with Steve. I got to Valiant when he started working there.

CBA: *Oh, so you didn't hear any response... Steve was very much a supporter, especially of early fandom, enormous supporter. But then, he got more reclusive after a while. I just wondered if you'd heard any response from him about the...*

Bob: I actually didn't know him at the time, and I really didn't get much response other than, I know at some point we returned all that art to him. Bill Pearson, who was working there at the time at Charlton was instrumental in seeing that a lot of this material didn't wind up in the grinder. Once we published it, we tried to return the material to the original artists.

CBA: *It seems one of the poignant things about* Charlton Bullseye *is that you guys started up when there was a relaunch going on at Charlton, but that relaunch obviously didn't last very long, and suddenly, the emphasis with the company was not on super heroes, which were enormously popular with fans. Did you feel like the rug was pulled out from underneath you, so to speak?*

Bob: I just think it was fate, more than anything, they just didn't have enough of what they needed at the time, and... just think they got buried in the marketplace. I don't think it was for a lack of enthusiasm... They did some things wrong, there's no doubt about it, they were very limited in their budget, and they were so far removed from the rest of the industry. I guess they just weren't aware of how the rest of the business behaved.

CBA: *So, you think that their all-in-one operation served to isolate them, too.*

Bob: Yeah, exactly. I think that definitely is one of the issues there. I think they had the right idea, but at the wrong time as well. You see it happening now with these new guys, Crossgen, where they're trying to do everything under one roof. Again, it's a good idea, I just think it was the wrong time, and they were that isolated, they weren't part of the comic book community as a whole, and as a result, I think they just kind of got lost in the shuffle.

CBA: *One of the things I noticed from going to the Sequling cons was the enormously personable Nick Cuti, at the tables. For some reason, we hung around the Charlton tables a lot, because there seemed to be a concerted effort to push for the fans at the time, '73, '74.*

Bob: Nick was a fireball when he was into that sort of thing. He's an enthusiast of comics, he really believes in what he was doing.

CBA: *He was a lone fireball, pretty much, right?*

Bob: Yeah, pretty much. He was there, and Bill Pearson was there, and both of them were long-time fans, and associates of Wally Wood, and they had a take on what comics should be, and... think, again, they were limited by their budget, but... think they gave it the good college try.

CBA: *Oh, yeah! We're talking about it 30 years later.*

Bob: Just the fact that they allowed a bunch of us kids from Indiana to take their characters and run with it.

CBA: *[laughs] Was somebody asleep at the wheel?*

Bob: I think they were very daring, and I think they weren't looking in terms of, "How much money could we have made off this?" or anything like that, they were looking at, "How much attention can we get? How much attention can these kids generate for us without us really having to do much of anything?" I look back on it now, and say "Wow, that took a lot of balls!" We could've really screwed things up!

CBA: *Did you make any money from doing* Charlton Bullseye?

Bob: Yeah, actually, that was my primary job for that year, anyway, that was the way I made my rent... from publishing that, and also during that time... started my association with Wally Wood, so I published the tenth issue of *witzend*, and I published a book—all in the *Charlton Bullseye* format—*Heroes, Inc.*, which was the second issue of that comic he'd done.

With "Cannon" and that sort of thing. It was the magazine-sized issue. Basically, Woody had that material in his inventory, so I basically did the same thing with him... did with Charlton, I took his material and put it together, and ran with it! So, it was during that time... started working for him as his assistant, and pretty much Woody got... I walked in—this was early '70s, right... you walk into Marvel carrying a stack of Wally Wood pages, and people got down on their knees and went "Salaam!" *[laughter]* It was very advantageous to me, because I would take my samples in when I volunteered to take Woody's stuff, and... take it up there, and I made sure I had my samples with me, and... got people to take a look at them, because it was "You want those pages? Look at my sh*t!" *[laughter]*

CBA: *Just backing up a little bit, with Charlton, did you ever go down and visit Derby?*

Bob: Oh, yeah, I went to the bowling alley.

CBA: *What was it like?*

Bob: It was a *bowling alley! [laughter]* No, people think... If... ever sat down and wrote a sitcom about a fledgling comic book company, I would totally base it on Charlton.

CBA: *Why?*

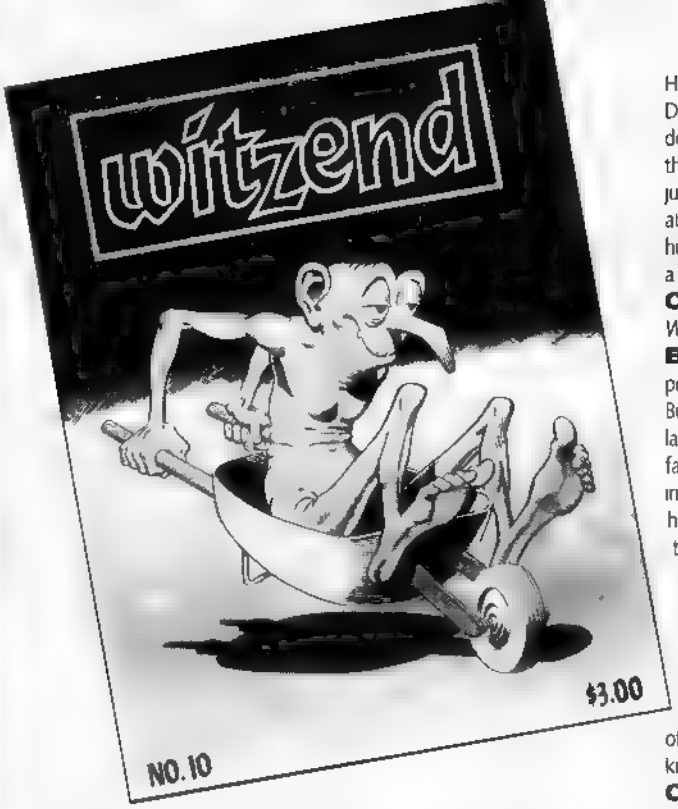
Bob: Well, because—again, this is where they had pieces of the puzzle, and there were other ones they didn't have—they had rented a space that was like a storage area on the side of a bowling alley there in Derby, Connecticut. So, you'd come in through the side door to get into the offices, but there was another door that attached to the main area of the bowling alley, so you could be sitting there talking to somebody, and you'd hear *SPING! [laughter]* And pins would fall, somebody'd say, "YAH!" Three guys slugging beers down, starting wolf calls and stuff in the middle of the day! It was just a bizarre environment, and I don't think anybody could be impressed walking through a tour of the place, you know? *[laughter]* But I guess... it had its charm, because we're sitting here and we're laughing, because it's almost incredible.

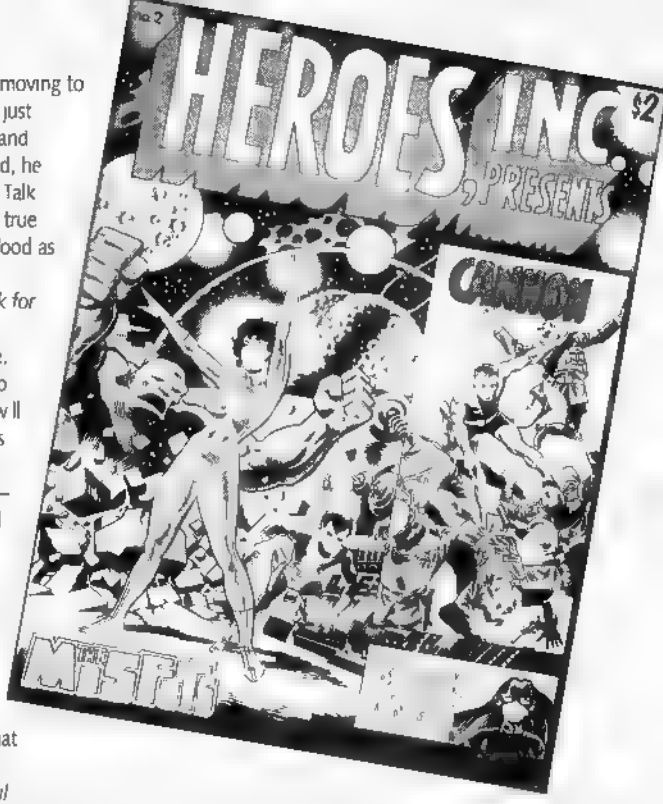
CBA: *It makes me wonder. When people got strikes, did that break concentration in the office?*

Bob: Absolutely. I'm sure they got their share of barroom fights and God knows what else! *[laughter]* It's a real small town in Connecticut, right? A real kind of economically depressed town, it was a very bizarre environment, but I look back at it now, and it's just comical! It's hard to believe.

CBA: *When you went there, did you go through the archives?*

Bob: Oh, absolutely. I'd pull down these big envelopes full of stuff, and it'd be marked this or that or whatever, and we'd pull something out and go, "Holy sh*t!" because it would be a Jeff Jones story he did for one of the anthology books, or we'd pull something out, and it'd be a whole Steve Ditko unpublished science-fiction story. The guys who were there, really—other than Nick—were pretty much clueless in terms of what this material was, or what its historic value was, and





Above: *Bob went on to edit two Wally Wood-related publications, (left)* witzend *#10 and (above)* Heroes, Inc. Presents. *©2001 the respective copyright holders.*

so they didn't care they weren't doing anything with it, it was just taking up space, as far as they were concerned. As a fan, it was Christmas every day, just unbelievable stuff we'd come across

CBA: *Do you recall stuff that, unfortunately, didn't make it into print that you might've planned?*

Bob: There was material... I'm trying to recall what it was. There was an actual whole sixth issue of *Charlton Bullseye* that never got published, it was going to be all about the female characters in the Charlton universe at the time, and Dick had done the cover for it, and can't recall what else was in there. There was some material there might've been a Nightshade story, I'm not sure, but it never wound up being printed.

CBA: *So what happened to that, do you recall?*

Bob: I don't recall. I know I no longer have any of the materials for that stuff, most of the stuff that wasn't used was returned. Now, who knows where it is? As far as I know, it wound up in a paper bale or something.

CBA: *The last issue, you had an extraordinary Alex Toth "Question" story. Do you recall what that was originally intended for?*

Bob: See, this is the thing people don't understand. E-Man stories and the Question stories were all done for us, commissioned for *Charlton Bullseye*.

CBA: *So, you called up Alex?*

Bob: Yeah, because at the time I was corresponding with Alex pretty regularly. He had done a cover for *CPL*, and he was pretty happy with the way it came out, and I'd actually gone out with a friend of mine and visited Alex out in California, attending one of the San Diego conventions, and I went up to his villa there overlooking the hills and he treated us just like royalty, it was really wonderful. So we had a very good relationship, and when we called him up and asked him if he'd be willing to do it, he said, "Yeah, as long as you pay me to do it, I'd be happy to!" So he sat down and did the job!

CBA: *Were your rates better than Charlton's?*

Bob: No. I think he did it out of the goodness of his heart, I don't think it had anything to do with money. I think it was basically he charged us a token fee because it was the professional thing to do. He was also doing some work at Charlton. He was doing some romance stuff, so he had a relationship with them already. And he liked us, and we worshiped him. *[laughter]* It was a mutual admiration thing.

CBA: *Did you move to Long Island? Where was Woody at the time?*

Bob: Woody was living there in Derby, Connecticut, believe it or not. Bill Pearson had moved him, I think he had been living in West Haven. Bill had talked him into moving to Derby, so he had a small house just down the road from me there, and that's pretty much how it started, he just lived right down the street. Talk about a childhood dream come true huh? It's like... having Wally Wood as a neighbor!

CBA: *How long did you work for Wally?*

Bob: Not a great deal of time, probably about six months or so. But I've got to say the lessons will last a lifetime. Woody, for all his faults—and everybody can go into all his Wally Wood stories—he was an enormously talented teacher. He had a way of just simplifying everything, it would make it so easy for you to understand how to do it, and of course, you had to sit there and listen to his stories! Part of the payment of getting all that knowledge...

CBA: *[laughs] Not too painful.*

Bob: You know, I was a fledgling musician, as well, so Woody and I would play the guitar together and stuff like that, it was kind of fun.

CBA: *Who was the assistant before you?*

Bob: Actually, there was an assistant there at the same time, a guy by the name of Al Sirois. He was working there at the same time. I don't know what happened to Al.

CBA: *Was Wayne Howard around?*

Bob: No, I think that was post-Wayne Howard. Wayne was doing stuff for Charlton at the time, and I met Wayne a couple of times while working for Woody, but...

CBA: *What's surprising is that... did you do any work for Charlton?*

Bob: Oh, yeah! That's where I started myself, I was inking John on an anthology book, "The Gooey House of Runny Death," and that sort of thing. *[laughter]*

CBA: *What artists were you inking—all of them?*

Bob: Nothing like Baboo. I think Charlie Nichols was the only guy who was drawing stuff at the time who wasn't inking his own work, so I got that. But... only did a few jobs before I wound up getting work at DC.

CBA: *You started off with DC?*

Bob: Like I said, I did a few jobs for Charlton, and then with my association with Woody, I was able to move on to DC, and started getting inking work there.

CBA: *Who were you inking, primarily, over there?*

Bob: Oh, God!

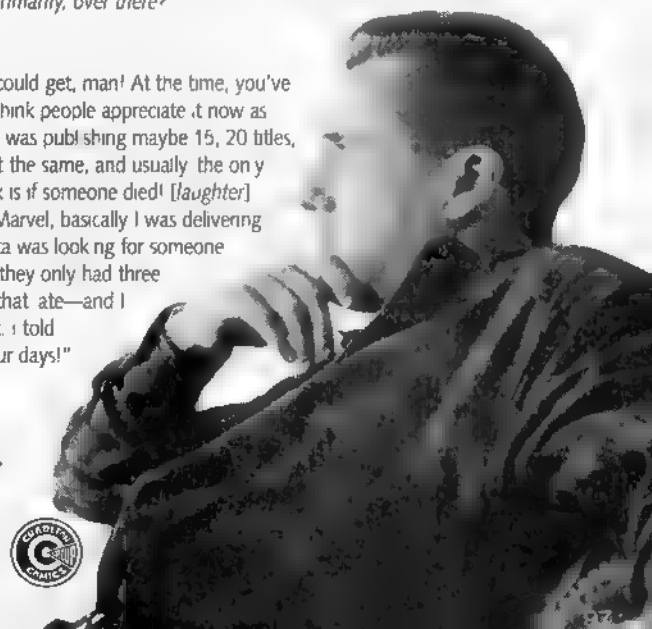
CBA: *Everybody?*

Bob: *[laughs]* No, whatever I could get, man! At the time, you've got to realize that—and I don't think people appreciate it now as much as at the time—I think DC was publishing maybe 15, 20 titles, Marvel was publishing just about the same, and usually the only way you wound up getting work is if someone died! *[laughter]* That's how I got my first job at Marvel, basically I was delivering stuff for Woody, and John Romita was looking for someone to ink an issue of *Iron Man*, but they only had three or four days to get it in—it was that late—and I swore up and down I could do it. I told Johnny, "Oh, I can do that in four days!" *[laughter]*

CBA: *And you did?*

Bob: And unfortunately, I did! *[laughter]* What I did was, at the time, a lot of the guys, my contemporanes, were working over at Continuity, so I went over to Continuity...

Below: *Bob faces the future in this recent photo. Courtesy of the artist.*



Rog-2001: Sterno Speaks!

Writer Roger Stern on the CPL/Gang-Charlton Connection

Conducted by Jon B. Cooke

An entertaining and eminently capable comics writer, Roger Stern is perhaps best recalled for his work on the Superman strip in Action Comics, *Amazing Spider-Man, The Avengers, Dr. Strange, and an especially memorable collaboration with John Byrne on Captain America in 1980-81. What you may not know is Sterno's career stretches back to Charlton (sorta) and the fanzines. The following E-mail interview took place in January, 2001.*

Center inset background: *Rog-2000 (wearing a hat resembling Sterno's trademark) making woo with a certain Rogette in a John Byrne drawing from CPL. Courtesy of Bob Layton & CPL/Gang Productions. Rog 2000 ©2001 the respective copyright holder.*

Below: *Roger Stern (left) and John Byrne on the day they met in 1974. Roger, who graciously contributed the snapshot, added, "Obviously this was taken just before John had his last growth spurt."*

Comic Book Artist: *When and where were you born?*
Roger Stern: September 17, 1950 in Noblesville, Indiana, a small town one county to the north of Indianapolis.
CBA: *First memories of comics?*
Roger: My earliest comics memory is of sitting on my Grandfather's knee as he read me the Sunday comic strips. Mom and Dad read them to me, too. I'd point to the individual panels, and the folks would read me the dialogue. And as soon as I was able to read for myself, I was allowed to plunk down my dimes for comic books at Hudson's Drugstore. I can't remember what the first one was probably an issue of *Walt Disney's Comics & Stories*. But *Superman* followed pretty quickly—I already knew him from TV.
CBA: *Did you develop aspirations to work in comics?*
Roger: Oh, not until I was in my early twenties. I always loved comics, but I never expected to make a living writing the crazy things. After all, I lived out in the middle of Indiana. It wasn't until after I started working on fanzines with Bob Layton, that I started to get a feeling that maybe I would want to try and get a little freelance work in the business. But I never imagined that it would wind up being my day job for 25 years.
CBA: *Recall your first memories of Charlton comics?*
Roger: I remember it vividly. It was New Years Eve, 1959, and I bought a copy of *Space Adventures* #33 at Hayden's Drugstore. That issue had the origin and first appearance of Captain Atom. It became one of those comics that I read until the cover separated and fell apart. (Just for the record, there were only three comic books that I ever read that heavily. The other two were *The Double Life of Private Strong* #1 and *The Brave and the Bold* #28.) Looking back, that must have been my first exposure to Steve Ditko's art—very nice! It was so moody... I don't think I'd ever seen anyone sweat in a comic book before that!

One of the things which impressed the nine-year-old me about that story was that it guest-starred the actual President of the United States! Steve Ditko drew a pretty recognizable Dwight Eisenhower. The face was retouched in later reprintings, but in the original comic it was definitely Ike's. Anyway, I kept going back to the comics spinner, looking for more of this Captain Atom guy, but didn't find any for years and years. Charlton's distribution was always pretty spotty in central Indiana. I never saw another Captain Atom issue until the Action Heroes revival in the mid sixties. It was about six years before I bought another Charlton comic. But when I discovered *Spider-Man*, I suddenly realized, "Hey! This is drawn by the same guy who drew Captain Atom!"
CBA: *When did you first become involved in fandom?*
Roger: That would have been in college. I'd been aware of fandom since my early teens, but I never really got too heavily into fanzines in my younger years. I never trusted the post office when I was a kid—they kept losing the cereal boxtop premiums I sent off for—or I might have tried subscribing to some of the earlier fanzines. But when I was in college, I managed to receive the issue of *Alter Ego* that Roy Thomas advertised in the Marvel books, and from there I learned about the conventions Phil Seuling threw in New York. With two college buddies, I drove to New York for the 1970 convention. And that lead to finding more 'zines, and meeting more fans .. I even found a few in Indiana.
CBA: *When did you meet Bob Layton?*
Roger: Oh, gee, that must have been sometime around 1973. Bob was playing comics dealer at the time, selling them out of his apartment in Indianapolis. By that time I was out of college and working in Indy, and we were introduced by some other area fans.
CBA: *Can you give us a history of CPL and your involvement?*
Roger: Bob can tell you about its beginnings better than I. But as I recall, *CPL* started out as Bob's sale catalog. Bob was drawing the covers and including little reviews written by some of his customers. By issue #5, it turned into a small 'zine with a catalog insert, and I started writing short articles for it. I eventually became an editor of sorts.
CBA: *Was CPL successful and can you share anecdotes?*
Roger: That depends upon how you define success. As I recall, we maintained a fairly regular publishing schedule for nearly two years which was pretty unheard of for most 'zines in those days. None of us made any money off of it, but we had a lot of fun. I can still remember sitting on the floor of Bob's apartment, collating pages and stapling them together. *CPL* was sort of a stepping stone into the business for Bob, John Byrne, and me. None of that was planned, of course. It just sort of happened.
CBA: *How did you guys get Toth to do "The Question" story?*
Roger: Dumb luck, I guess. Somehow, we'd gotten Toth's address and sent him a complimentary copy of *CPL*. Then, we managed to get him to draw a cover for issue # 11. When Bob launched *Charlton Bullseye*, one of the things we both really wanted to do was run a new Question story—and since we weren't sure how to get in touch with Steve Ditko, we hit on the idea of asking Toth. I think Bob called him. Anyway, Toth said yes.
CBA: *Did you produce stories directly for Charlton? If so, what were they and how was it dealing with George Wildman and/or Nick Cuti?*
Roger: I wrote only three stories for Charlton, but none of them were ever published. Two were Rog-2000 stories for the back of *E-Man*. They were accepted on a Friday .. and then *E-Man* was canceled on the following Monday, so they were never officially bought. I think I still have a copy of the scripts somewhere. My first real sale was a book-length *Phantom* story which was actually bought and paid for—but never drawn. I'd been corresponding with Don Newton, and he'd encouraged me to submit ideas for *The Phantom*. I sent in three or four plot ideas, and Charlton accepted the one that I thought was the least original—all about the Phantom discovering a lost Atlantean colony in a hidden corner of the Deep Woods. The real shame was that Don was just bubbling over with great ideas for *The Phantom*—ideas that the readers never got to see. He wanted to

develop a regular antagonist for the Phantom, a real opposite number that Don had tentatively called the Red Spectre. As I recall, that particular idea was shot down as being "too much like Marvel." Since Marvel was—at the time—beating the pants off everyone in sales, I could never figure out why Charlton was so reluctant. Maybe they were getting flak from King Features. Like I said, it was a shame, because Don's *Phantom* was so good, but it could have been really great. Anyway, on the Rog-2000 stories, I worked with Nick Cuti, who was incredibly nice about walking me through the process and helping me fix what I was doing wrong. By the time *The Phantom* came along, Nick had gone freelance, and the editor I worked with was Bill Pearson. I did meet George Wildman briefly at a New York convention, but I never had any formal contact with him as a writer.

CBA: *Did you enjoy the '70s Charlton books?*

Roger: Sure, though not as much as I liked the late '60s Charltons. I especially loved Ditko's work on *Captain Atom* and *The Blue Beetle*, but I followed their whole Action Hero line. There was all of that great early work by Aparo, O'Neil, and Skeates. Dick Giordano on Sarge Steel, P.A.M., Pat Boyette. Mighty nice. I stuck with the Charlton Ghost books into the '70s, because they were the only place you could find Ditko on a regular basis. And then *E-Man* came along—sweet stuff.

CBA: *Do you recall meeting John Byrne for the first time? What was your relationship and did you collaborate early on material?*

Roger: Yes, that would have been the July 4th weekend of 1974. John and I had corresponded prior to that, and I think we might have even chatted on the phone once or twice, but that was our first face-to-face meeting. By that time, of course, we had already worked together on the Rog-2000 strip which wound up appearing in *CPL* #11. Bob, John, our pal Larry Brnicky, and I all converged on Duffy Vohland's apartment in Brooklyn just prior to the '74 Seuling Con, and that's where John and I met. (Anyone who had any drawing ability wound up inking backgrounds on a George Perez story for *Monsters Unleashed*.) The reason we were all in New York was that we were premiering a double-issue of *CPL*—in the guise of the *Charlton Portfolio*—at the convention. In fact, it was at that convention that Nick Cuti saw the art for the first Rog-2000 strip. And that led to John's getting work at Charlton, drawing Rog as a backup in *E-Man*. That led to *Wheelie and the Chopper Bunch*, *Doomsday +1*, and *Space: 1999*... and, indirectly, to "Iron Fist" at Marvel.

CBA: *Were your aspirations to break into Marvel and/or DC? How did the final break come about?*

Roger: Oh, no. As I said earlier, I never expected to work in comics. I went to work writing commercial copy for an Indianapolis radio station in 1973—and, if I gave the future any thought at all, I figured that I'd have a modest career in broadcasting. As *CPL* became better known, I picked up a few freelance assignments for Marvel's fanzine *FOOM*, and started to give some thought to writing the occasional story for Charlton on the side. Then, I was fired from the radio station. (A newly-hired Station Manager had a friend who was looking for work—and so, I was soon the one who was looking for work.) That was late in the Summer of '75, just before Bob Layton launched NAPCON, Indianapolis's first comics convention. The plus side of getting fired meant that I had more time to spend at the con. Not long afterward, Bob moved east to Connecticut to pursue comics work, and I spent about four months sending out resumes and collecting unemployment. Then, in December of '75, I got an offer to test for an assistant editor job at Marvel. I passed the test and wound up working full-time in comics for the next 25 years.

CBA: *Can you tell us of your involvement in the development of* Charlton Bullseye?

Roger: After the '74 New York convention, I went back to Indiana. But Bob stayed over a few extra days, and went up to visit the Derby offices. When he returned, he sat me down and told me that Charlton had given him approval to produce *Bullseye*. And he wanted me to write for it. Well, of course, I agreed. It sounded like great fun, and I figured that I might even get an opportunity to learn more about writing for comics. I had no idea that I was soon going to get thrown into the deep end.

What happened was Charlton had an unpublished Captain Atom story in the drawer, fully penciled by Steve Ditko, but there was no sign of a plot or script. The original plan was for the story to be scripted by Len Wein or Marv Wolfman—or both of them—and that Klaus Janson was going to ink it. Somehow, that never happened. I wound up scripting the story and Brother Byrne wound up inking it. I used a pseudonym on the first part, because I was so spooked over the idea of scripting a Steve Ditko story. His storytelling was so clear that I had no trouble telling what was going on. I haven't looked at the script in years. I'm almost afraid to. (That was the first time John inked Steve Ditko, you might want to ask him about it.)

CBA: *Was Bullseye successful?*

Roger: Well, we had fun while it lasted. I didn't really do as much work on *Bullseye* after Bob moved to Connecticut. He produced the last two issues in Derby, and my only contributions were a short essay about Charlton science fiction comics and the plot idea for the Question story—and I think that work was probably done before Bob's move. But I had a lot of fun making up backstories for Dr. Graves and Mr. Dedd. I even got the opportunity to come up with first names for them and Captain Adam.

CBA: *Ideally, would you have wanted to revive the Action Hero characters?*

Roger: Oh, yeah. I loved those characters. I always thought it was a shame that DC changed them so much from what they had been. I never thought there was much wrong with the concepts or the characters. What they mainly needed was better printing and production values—and much better distribution.

CBA: *Did you maintain contact with Bob Layton and John Byrne after the end of* CPL *and* Charlton Bullseye?

Roger: Oh, sure. Once I had landed at Marvel, it was actually easier to stay in touch. John was already penciling *Iron Fist*, and was visiting New York on a more regular basis. And I eventually became his editor (on *X-Men*, *Avengers*, and *Marvel Two-In-One*) and Bob's (on *Iron Man*). Of course, I worked with John as writer on *Captain America*, we also worked on a *Hulk Annual*, and in the Fall of '99, Bob penciled part of an *Iron Man* story that I wrote.

CBA: *Can you describe your collaborations with John Byrne?*

Roger: Big fun. We're on the phone a lot, just as a matter of course. We probably make AT&T very happy. When we've worked together, I've generally given John a fairly loose plot. In fact, on the recent *Marvel: The Lost Generation*, we mostly just talked over the general thrust of the stories before he went off and drew them.

TWILIGHT IN BROOKLYN
A NIGHT LIKE MOST AT DUFFY'S TAVERN
BUT THIS NIGHT WILL BE DIFFERENT
FOR TONIGHT WILL HERALD
PTUI
ROG 2000
THE COMING OF THE
HOW DUFFY'LL LOVE THE LOOK!
ROG 2000!
HOLD ON NOW! IS THIS WHAT STAFF'S WHAT ARE THEY DOING HERE? LET'S FLASHBACK A FEW HOURS...
OH NO! NOT AGAIN!
HOLD IT DOWN STERNO, THERE'S AN ARTIST AT WORK!
LOOK, YOU MEATBALL, YOU'LL LEARN TO SPELL OUR NAME RIGHT!
WOW!? YOU HAVEN'T WORKED IN MONTHS, LAYTON!
OH YEAH?
ROG 2000!

Above: *Sterno and Layton have at it (with Duffy Vohland cameo) in two pages of Roger Stern & John Byrne's Rog-2000 strip in* CPL *#11. Courtesy of Bob Layton & CPL/Gang Prods. Rog-2000 ©2001 the respective copyright holder.*

#1

FIRST ISSUE IN APRIL!

DRAW!

THE IN-DEPTH "HOW-TO" MAGAZINE ON COMICS AND CARTOONING, BY WORKING PROFESSIONALS!

PREMIERE ISSUE! Finally, an in-depth "how-to" magazine **by** working professionals, **for** professionals and aspiring amateurs! **DRAW!** features interviews and demonstrations by top artists in the fields of comics, cartooning, and animation on such skills as layout, storytelling, penciling, inking, lettering, coloring, Photoshop techniques, plus web guides and techniques, tips, tricks, and more! #1 features

- "Penciling" by **JERRY ORDWAY!**
- "Layout and Drawing on the Computer" by **DAVE GIBBONS!**
- "The Secrets of Drawing Sexy Women" by **BRET BLEVINS!**
- Lettering tips by **JOHN COSTANZA**, and an inking demonstration by **RICARDO VILLAGRAN!**

Plus an article by **SHANE GLINES,** a piece on moving from comics to the Internet with **KIERON DWYER** and the men of Channel 13, **LARRY YOUNG** and **JOHN HEEBINK** on "The Bod," a cover by **BLEVINS,** and much, much more!

(Edited by MIKE MANLEY • 88 pages with COLOR section)

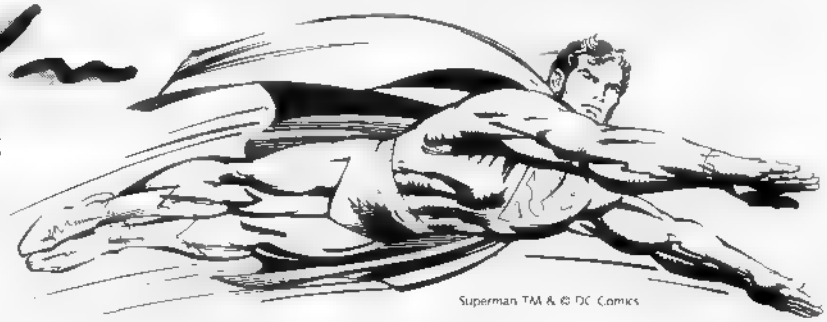
SUBSCRIBE NOW! Four Issues in the US $20 Standard, $32 First Class (Canada: $40, Elsewhere $44 Surface, $60 Airmail)

#31

THE BIG ONE IS HERE IN MARCH!

NEW GIANT TABLOID FORMAT!
80 "KING"-SIZED PAGES!

THE JACK KIRBY COLLECTOR



We initiate our **NEW DOUBLE-SIZE, EXTRA-LENGTH FORMAT** with

- New huge wraparound **KIRBY COVER** inked by **NEAL ADAMS!**
- Jack's widest **TWO-PAGE SPREADS** and **LONGEST STORIES,** including the **2001** and **BICENTENNIAL BATTLES** Treasury Editions!
- Colossal interviews with **KURT BUSIEK** & **JOSÉ LADRONN,** & extra **UNPUBLISHED KIRBY ART,** shown at **GIANT-SIZE!**

(SUBSCRIBERS: #31 counts as TWO issues toward your old subscription • Mailed in a protective envelope with backing board)

SUBSCRIBE NOW! Four Tabloid-Size Issues in the US $36 Standard, $52 First Class (Canada $60 Elsewhere $64 Surface $80 Airmail)

TwoMorrows. Bringing New Life To Comics Fandom.

VISA MasterCard

TwoMorrows • 1812 Park Drive • Raleigh, NC 27605 USA • 919-833-8092 • FAX 919-833-8023 • e-mail twomorrow@aol.com • www.twomorrows.com

Due to 2001 increases by the US Postal Service (and elimination of "Printed Matter" rates for overseas shipments), TwoMorrows Publishing has been forced to adjust its subscription and back issue rates (see back cover) and ship all existing overseas subscriptions by Surface Mail. We hope you understand, and thanks for your continued support!

Rich Larson, Charlton Cover Guy

The "Good Girl" artist on working for the Derby company

Conducted by Jon B. Cooke

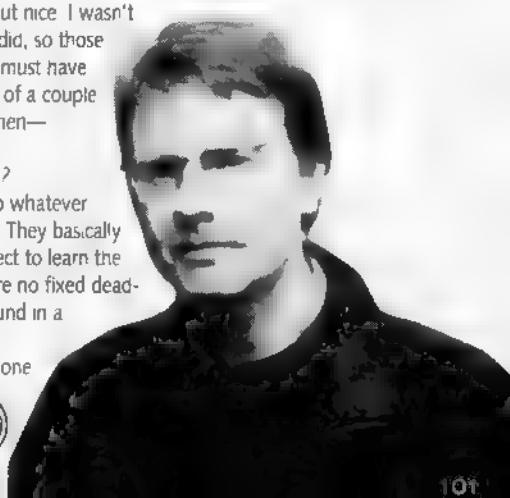
Rich Larson, now of Haunted House of Lingerie *fame but once admired for his Charlton horror work, has seen work published by a variety of companies, including DC, Last Gasp, Sal Quartuccio, First, Quality, and others. Perhaps best recalled for his painting collaborations with Steve Fastner (winning the 1981 Warren Award for Best Cover, 1994 #22), the artist got his first break with—you guessed it!—Charlton Comics in the 1970s. Here's an all-too brief phone talk with Rich (who copyedited the transcript) conducted last minute on January 31, 2001. Thanks to Joel Thingvall for hooking ye ed up.*

Comic Book Artist: *Rich, where are you from?*
Rich Larson: Minneapolis. I was born in 1952.
CBA: *Did you have an early interest in comics?*
Rich: Yeah, pretty much like a lot of other guys who grew up in the early to mid-'60s. The early Marvel stuff and more the DC books. I started drawing pretty early, doing the illustrations they had on the inside of matchbook covers, drawing the little skunk, and so forth. I had an interest in comics pretty much right from the beginning.
CBA: *Did you aspire at a young age to become a comic book artist?*
Rich: I think so. By my early teens, I was thinking that would be a pretty neat thing. I kept reading comics up until 1969, but come the '70s—when there was a big explosion of material—I kind of lost interest. I liked the very early guys and then the Second Wave of artists like Steranko, Barry Smith, and guys like that. By the time Gil Kane was doing most of Marvel's covers, I'd stopped reading them.
CBA: *Did you pick up Charlton comics in the '60s?*
Rich: Yeah. I really liked the Ditko stuff—Captain Atom, Blue Beetle, and I liked The Question quite a bit. I thought they were a neat different kind of take on the super-hero thing.
CBA: *When did you start going for professional work?*
Rich: Probably early to mid-'70s. The first stuff I got to do professionally was for Charlton, around 1976. There was a local comic book club, the Minnesota Comic Collectors Association, and there was a guy named Dave Mruz, a local historian. In the late-'60s through the early '80s, he was the nexus—a sparkplug—for a lot of us fans who wanted to get together and talk about comics. Through him I met a guy I now do a lot of artwork with, Steve Fastner, an airbrush artist.
CBA: *How did you score the Charlton gig?*
Rich: If memory serves, a local fan and writer named Charlie Smith had written some stories he wanted to submit to Charlton. I may have just drawn up one of his stories and just sent it in cold. And it was accepted! It was a pretty neat time-travel story about an old scientist with a heart condition who builds himself a time machine and it's his dream to see the future before he dies. Almost on his last legs, he climbs into the machine, sets the machine off to the future, and when he arrives, he sees the surroundings are exactly the same. He clutches his heart and dies of a heart attack, and the last shot of the story we pull back and we see a sign that says that the area has been preserved to look exactly like it did back in 1976.
CBA: *[chuckles] Who was your Charlton collaborator, Tim Boxell?*
Dan: Tim was living in Minneapolis at the time and just starting to get into comics. He did some inking and coloring with me. Back then, Charlton was actually publishing fully painted covers. Tom Sutton, Mike Zeck, and other artists did some. So we did some, too. I would pencil the cover. Tim would ink them and finish it off in water color. I think we did about a half dozen of those.
CBA: *Tim had experience working in undergrounds, right?*
Rich: Yes, he did. He started *Commies From Mars* for Last Gasp and contributed to *Slow Death*, as well. He did quite a few stories for Ron Turner at Last Gasp. He also started one of the first funny animal undergrounds in the wake of the Howard the Duck mania, called No Ducks, a funny animal collection except for no ducks. [laughter] He moved to San Francisco and got work in TV and then at a special effects company called Colossal Pictures. They did sfx on movies like *Top Gun* and *The Right Stuff*. Tim started out by doing storyboards and eventually ended up directing music videos for groups like The Call and Robert Palmer's Power Station. Now he's exclusively directing. One was *Aberration*, a direct-to-video horror film.
CBA: *So, in the '70s, you two worked as a team?*
Rich: Not exactly. He had a full-time job, just inking on the side.
CBA: *So you were looking for a job in mainstream comics?*
Rich: I was giving it some serious thought. The Charlton experience was fun. I actually went and talked to Jim Shooter and Larry Hama at Marvel very briefly. I showed them my work and they were very encouraging. But I never got around to doing work for them. I hooked up with Sal Quartuccio and as a result Steve and I have done portfolios and, more recently, the *Gallery Girls* books he's currently publishing.
CBA: *Who did you deal with over at Charlton?*
Rich: George Wildman, the editor, but contact was through the mail so I would get a bunch of scripts by guys like Joe Gill from him every two or three months. Nick Cuti might've been there but Wildman was the guy we were dealing with.
CBA: *What was your favorite work at Charlton?*
Rich: Some of the watercolor covers turned out nice. I wasn't particularly accomplished on the interior work I did, so those were less satisfying to do. Probably altogether I must have done 10-15 stories for those guys over a period of a couple of years. I was trying to do a page a day back then—pencils, inks, and letters—for $30-35 a page.
CBA: *Was Charlton a training ground for you?*
Rich: Absolutely. They pretty much let you do whatever you wanted to do. They never asked for re-dos. They basically sent you a script and left you alone. It was perfect to learn the craft. Ideal for a guy just starting out. There were no fixed deadlines as I recall, I just had to turn the stories around in a reasonable amount of time.

It was fun to work at Charlton. Ditko was one of my heroes so to be doing work at the same company as he was an enormous rush.

Above: *Slammin' Larson/Boxell cover to* The Many Ghosts of Dr. Graves *#57 sans logo. Courtesy of Joel Thingvall. ©2001 the respective copyright holder.*

Below: *The artist himself, now best known for his "gallery girls" books, in a recent photo. Courtesy of Rich Larson.*



An Offer They Couldn't Refuse

Dan Reed on his Charlton career & jumpstarting *Bullseye*

Opposite page: *Splash of Charlton Bullseye #1 featuring Dan Reed's rendition of two of Charlton's greatest Action Heroes. Courtesy of Al Val Characters ©2001 DC Comics*

Below: *Dan the Man. Our interview subject really pulled through with flying colors for CBA and we're indebted to him for putting up with ye ed's lateness in getting this transcript to his hands very late in the game, even though the artist was in transit to Florida. We also regret having to crop out a sample of Dan's painting. Our apologies, Mr. Reed. Photo courtesy of Dan Reed*

Conducted & transcribed by Chris Irving

For a brief period in the 1980s, Charlton began publishing non-reprint material, specifically in the pages of Charlton Bullseye*—the comic book not the fanzine—and that curious experiment was due to the initiative of our following subject. Ye ed met Dan Reed at a Ramapo comic convention a few years ago where the gregarious and enthusiastic artist raved about* Comic Book Artist, *sending this editor away blushing. Chris Irving interviewed the artist via phone in December 2000 and the artist copyedited the transcript.*

Chris Irving: *Your comic book career began at Charlton?*

Dan Reed: Oh, yeah. [*In the comic book*] *Charlton Bullseye* #1 I was doing some fan stuff and had said "Jeez, I'd love to get published." I'd sent samples over to both Marvel and DC, which would keep getting sent back with nice notes, like "Not quite ready yet." I thought, "What about Charlton?" At the time, this was after their last gasp with all the great stuff by Don Newton, Mike Zeck, and Joe Staton. They were just doing reprints at the time. I went up and proposed the idea to George Wildman and Bill Pearson that they could put my work in. They said "Well, we can't really do that, because we don't have any budget." I said, "It's okay, you don't have to pay me. Slip it into one of your magazines that you're doing now, and I would get the exposure and see what it looks like in print, and you would get free, new material." They thought that was a good idea. *Charlton Bullseye* was born. I think I'm the only guy who did, beside *Bullseye*, one of their horror magazines. I was in Baron Weirwulf's *Haunted Library* #59. I did the cover and the inside. When I went up there, I stayed at Mike Zeck's house. He was nice enough to put me up and drive me over to Charlton. John Beatty, a friend of his who was inking Zeck at the time, offered to ink this for free. He inked the cover and the inside story of that issue.

Chris: *What other Bullseyes did you have stuff in?*

Dan: #1 and #7. I'm the only guy who did The Question, Blue Beetle, and Captain Atom at Charlton besides Steve Ditko.

Chris: *How would you describe your art as far as influences go?*

Dan: Probably too many influences: Jack Kirby, Steranko, John Buscema, Joe Kubert, Gene Colan... all of the great guys who you grow up with. With Neal Adams, your jaw drops and you go 'Wow!' It all creeps in, and hopefully none of it is overwhelming, you take a bit of this and a bit of that, and put your own touch to it, and hopefully it comes out as your own style.

Chris: *Where did you go after Charlton?*

Dan: The idea was that I would get enough published work to prove that I could start getting paying work. After the Charlton stuff went over to DC, I started getting work. My first work after that was *House of Mystery* #301. I did a frontispiece. It had a Joe Kubert cover, and it was fun. I also did the frontpieces in #305 and #316. I drew *Indiana Jones* #9 and #10 [*for Marvel*] and *What If?* #38.

I went over to Paris at one point, and started doing *Transformers* for their magazine over there. I started with issue #115, and it went on... I did quite a bit of those. I came back to the States after about three-and-a-half years. I did *Hulk* #360, and a *Transformers* cover as well as inking on *Transformers* #56 and #64. I did a *Marvel Presents* #59, where I pencilled and inked a Punisher story. For DC, I did *TSR Worlds Annual*, and a *Forgotten Realms Annual*. I did a lot of self-publishing—eight issues of *New World Order* and did another one called *Retrodead*. I also did three or four issues of *Big Bang*, and came up with my own character, The Dimensioneer. That was fun.

Chris: *When did you freelance at Marvel?*

Dan: I guess about '83.

Chris: *It was in '80 or so when you went to Charlton?*

Dan: I think those were published in '81, but I did it in '80. I was born in 1960, so I guess I was 20 at the time. The first thing I got published was *Universe* #1, it was a local fan thing down in Miami. I did the cover, and an interview with C.C. Beck who I used to hang out with.

Chris: *How did you first get in touch with C.C.?*

Dan: That's a funny story. I found out, at the local conventions, that he was living in Miami. I grabbed a couple of bus rides, and it took a couple hours to get there. I was afraid to call him, because I was afraid he'd say no and didn't want to see me. I went over there and rang the doorbell, and he wasn't home, so I sat on the doorstep determined to wait for him to get back. After an hour, his neighbor comes out, who's this woman, and she asked "Are you waiting for Mr. Beck?" I said "Yeah. I wanted to show him my work and talk to him." She said "You're going to have to wait, he's on vacation for two weeks!" [*laughter*] She gave me his phone number, and I called and left my number. He actually then called me and had heard about that. He said "Do me a favor, and just call before you come over next time." I was 13 at the time. I used to go out and see him all the time, and he started to hire me out during the summers to help him out in the studio. This was after he did his run with *Shazam!* at DC. He was doing these handpainted things for Jerry DeFuccio, and a couple of originals.

Chris: *How would you describe C.C., personally?*

Dan: I thought he was a really nice guy. He was very opinionated but that's okay. I think that a lot of strong-willed and intense people are. For him to take some young kid he doesn't even know, and help me out by showing me how to letter and use the brush... All of my first training on how comics were set up came from him, so for him to spend all that time on a thirteen year-old boy he'd never met before,... almost felt like Billy Batson!

Chris: *Billy Batson hanging out with the Wizard.*

Dan: Exactly! [*laughter*]

Chris: *What did you learn from C.C., as far as both your art and approach to things?*

Dan: He showed me a lot of the technical stuff, and his advice was "Don't get into comics." [*laughter*] I'm not sure as far as an outlet goes. I was just in awe of the guy.

Chris: *Did you continue to work for C.C. through high school?*

Dan: No, I just did it for a couple of years, until I was 15 or 16. I don't know, I just drifted away and didn't talk to him as much. I started working on other stuff.

One really interesting story, getting off of that, was when I was 15. They had a big thing called Miami Con I, where for the first time, they had C.C. Beck, and Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, and Neal Adams. They had an art contest, with some of the stuff that ended up in a Warren magazine. I put a piece in, and Jack Kirby was the judge, and judged my work first place. To me that was a great honor. Jack Kirby judged my work first place!

Chris: *Sounds like you've had some great experiences. What prompted you to move to France?*

Dan: I had gotten pretty heavily into painting, and had gotten away from just doing comics. I started doing modern art when I was 23, about the time I was doing stuff for Marvel. I started to drift away from just comic books, and started approaching the so-called art world. I started reading about the cave paintings in Lascaux, and all the French Impressionists, and of course I was crazy about *Heavy Metal*. It seemed like going over there would be a good experience for me. I sold my few possessions and decided I was just going to live over there. I sold my return trip ticket, and ended up shoveling horse manure on a farm five kilometers from France for six months. Eventually I made it in Paris thanks to Marvel UK. It's strange, because I hitchhiked across Western Europe. I would never hitchhike across the United States. Lots of young people over in Europe at that time were hitchhiking, it was something heavily done at the time. I thought "Why not?" It was a different atmosphere than it would be over here. I think it would be suicide to try over here.

ANOTHER EPISODE
IN THE CAREERS OF
THE BLUE BEETLE & THE QUESTION!
TOGETHER THEY MEET THE MOST INSCRUTABLE FOE EITHER HAS EVER KNOWN...
the ENIGMA!
EDITOR - GEORGE WILDMAN
STORY - BENJAMIN [illegible]TH
PENCILS - DAN REED
PLOT - A COMMITTEE
DIALOGUE - ANON O. MOUSE
SOUND EFFECTS - B. PEARSON
INKS - DAN REED
COLORS - WENDY FIORE

I came back to the U.S. in '88, right after the Marvel Christmas party. I didn't have much money, so I took a cheap Virgin-Atlantic fare instead of the Pan Am [*Lockerbee*] flight that blew up. It was leaving at the same time, out of England. It gave me the creeps. If I'd had more money, I would have taken Pan Am, but since I didn't have that much.

Chris: *It was a good day to be poor, wasn't it?*

Dan: Yes, it was! I was in the air, and they started talking about how this thing had happened. Very scary.

Chris: *Any other comics work at the time?*

Dan: I did some fan stuff for Bill Black called *Fun Comics*. The second issue had Stuntman in there, and I think I did a Stuntman story around '81. Bill Black was terrific. I went over to see Bill and drove up from Miami to Longwood, Florida. I had an old beat-up car, and it conked out in front of his house. I was the man who came to dinner and wouldn't leave! He put me up for the night as the car was getting fixed. He was a great guy, and has a wonderful wife and daughter. He was so nice to me.

Chris: *What are you doing now?*

Dan: I did the self-publishing for a while, and then I did the stuff for *Big Bang* as recently as a couple years ago. Unfortunately, I couldn't get enough people to generate interest in my self-publishing stuff. It was very difficult to continue, which is a shame, because I enjoyed doing it. About three years ago, I started doing representational painting, versus the pure abstract. I fell right into it. I'd been painting all those years with the abstract and non-objective stuff. Of course, I had the drawing experience from comics, and I put it together and it really worked out.

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
ORIGINAL ART WANTED BY COLLECTOR!
DITKO • ROMITA • KANE • ANDRU • FRENZ
INTERIOR PAGES • SKETCHES • STRIP ART
PLEASE CONTACT:
JEFF SHARPE
920-426-2849
jsharpe@vbe.com
www.vbe.com/~jsharpe/asf.html

Modern Mythology Inc.
COMIC ART GALLERY
COMICS STORE
OPENING IN CHICAGO, 2001
Looking for:
- INVESTORS
- ARTISTS
- ART COLLECTORS
For more information or business plan contact:
Joe Muszynski
@(773) 244-1412 or joem@wwa.com
FOR MORE INFORMATION, ON THE WEB AT:
www.modernmythologyinc.com

Charlton Twilight & Afterlife

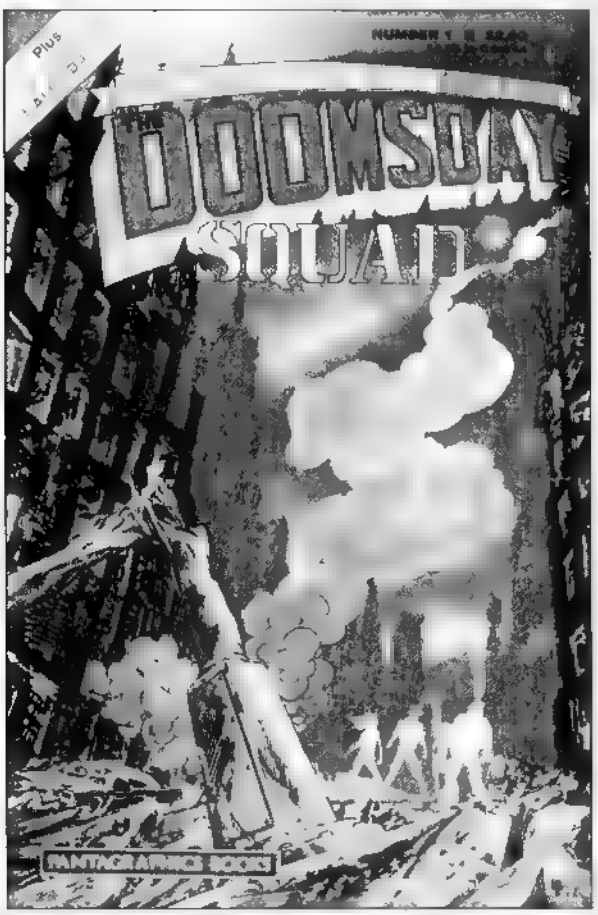
The final days of Charlton Publications and beyond

by Christopher Irving

Opposite page: *Unpublished cover to Charlton Bullseye that would have gone with the Rik Levins story which eventually saw print in Americomics #3 Courtesy of Bill Black Characters ©2001 DC Comics*

It can be said that Charlton Comics was considered a compromise between the "fly by night" comic publishers of the Golden Age, and the major companies such as DC and Marvel. When Charlton finally closed the doors on their comic book line in the mid-1980s, the various properties and books were sold to whoever had the money to buy them. Due to the fractured nature of the former Charlton empire—and the lack of records from the defunct publisher—there appears no one complete record of who now owns what.

Arguably the most notable of Charlton's comic book properties sold off were the so-called "Action Hero" books—those titles helmed by Dick Giordano in the 1960s—such as *Blue Beetle, Peter Cannon. Thunderbolt, Sarge Steel/Secret Agent, Captain Atom,* and *Judomaster,* though the characters were briefly licensed to another company, AC Comics, before finding their current home with DC Comics.



Above: *While renowned for publishing perhaps the best comic books in America, Fantagraphics in the '80s occasionally delved into blatantly commercial projects such a reprinting of John Byrne & Joe Gill's* Doomsday +1 *series in 1986. For copyright reasons, the series was renamed* The Doomsday Squad. *Here's Byrne's new cover for #1 ©2001 Fantagraphics. Characters ©2001 the respective copyright holder*

In 1983, AC's founder Bill Black made a deal with Charlton comics then-assistant editor Bill Pearson to run the remainder of the *Charlton Bullseye* material, in color, through his then-fledgling publishing company. The deal lasted a year, at which point the Action Hero rights reverted back to Charlton. With the rights now back in the hands of the original publisher, DC Comics Executive Vice President Paul Levitz reportedly arranged to purchase the characters as an in-house gift for Dick Giordano, former Charlton comics managing editor credited with producing the memorable line, who was then an executive at DC himself. The nature of the deal was a combination of licensing fees and royalties.

While in *CBA* #9 Giordano claimed the rights were purchased for $30,000, former Charlton General Manager Ed Konick disagreed, stating in a letter to the magazine [*published in* CBA *#10*], "We made a certain amount for licensing and were paid royalties between 1982 (when the contract was signed) and 1990, amounting to over three times the amount Dick said. Charlton earned close to $100,000 on the deal, hardly 'peanuts,' [*Giordano's characterization*] by my thinking." (Citing the proprietary nature of the purchase, DC Comics declined any official comment on the arrangement.)

The one Action Hero not originally part of the DC/ Charlton deal was Peter Cannon. Thunderbolt, a property whose trademark reverted to Peter A. Morisi, the character's creator. DC eventually purchased Thunderbolt from Morisi, with the promise of a royalty, and with the understanding rights would revert back to PAM if DC's expectation of the character was not realized. After a failed DC *Thunderbolt* series, Morisi once again owns the rights to his creation.

With the Action Heroes off the market, what became of the other vast holdings of comic book material left in Charlton's inventory upon its dissolution as a corporation? At first glance, there seemed arguably few other commercially viable genres in the company's comic book inventory worth purchasing, but buyers did come to call. As best as *Comic Book Artist* can ascertain, here is what has become of the Derby, Connecticut publisher's comic book legacy.

Bill Black/AC Comics

"I bought *Nyoka the Jungle Girl* outright, as well as [*stories from*] *Billy the Kid* by John Severin," Bill Black of AC Comics said. "I was approached by [*Charlton consultant*] Robin Snyder when Charlton was disposing of their comic book line. I utilized material that was published by Charlton, and that was acquired by the licensing of real people. Charlton licensed those characters and, without the license, Charlton wouldn't have the right to publish them. A licensing agent, Dawn Licensing, handled Roy Rogers, Hopalong Cassidy, and Tom Mix. Tom Mix was published by the end [*of its run*] by Charlton, in *Six Gun Heroes* and other books, as reprints of the Fawcett material) as well as other Western stars. I got Tom Mix and Hopalong Cassidy through Dawn Licensing, and I cut a personal deal with the other stars, like Lash LaRue and Sunset Carson."

Black, who has currently been reprinting the Charlton material in the pages of AC titles like *Best of the West,* described how Charlton General Manager Ed Konick, who was in charge of selling the material and Robin Snyder packaged the titles. "What they were selling were photostats made from the position negatives. It was like a contact print. You burned it in, which threw the negatives on stat paper that was about 18" by 24". These were folded up, and all the pages were put in big envelopes. That's how these lots were dispensed. Trying to get the best money for it, I guess, Robin would put all the issues of *Nyoka* in one lot, and *Hot Rods and Racing Cars* in another lot. If it was a long run, he would break it down to 10 or 20 issues for so much money. After a certain period of time, he was through, and sold all he was able to sell."

Joe Simon

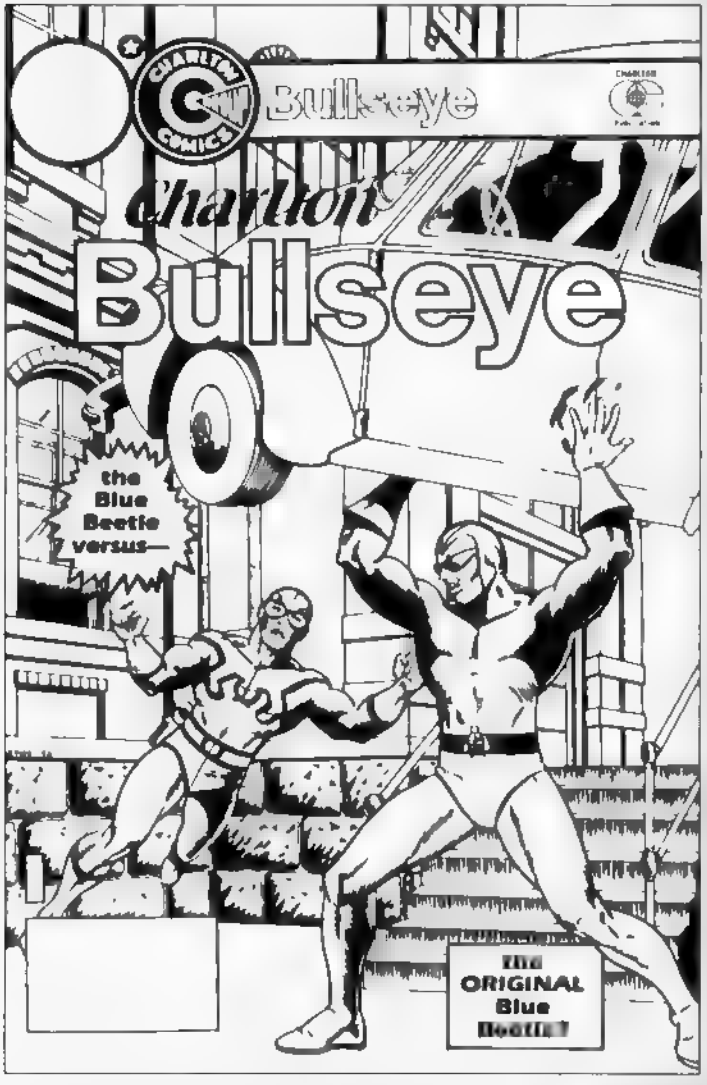
Golden Age legend Joe Simon regained all of the Simon & Kirby properties once published by Charlton, due to a contract he and onetime partner Jack Kirby had signed with the company. "That was all done contractually with Charlton," Simon recalled, "and was supposed to have been published by Simon & Kirby Publications at the Derby address. Everything was covered contractually, and we also had the copyrights and copyright renewals. What happened was that Main line Publications was dissolved and we kept the copyrights. I had a contract with [*Charlton Business Manager*] Ed Levy. We used to go down there once a week and have pizza with the two owners," Simon said with a laugh.

Robin Snyder

Robin Snyder, editor and publisher of the highly regarded newsletter *The Comics,* was then helping to sell off the Charlton material. He claims ownership, with cartoonist Steve Ditko, on much of the Ditko-drawn material. "Steve Ditko and I purchased, among others, Killjoy [*back-up strip in* E-Man] *Konga,* the title to *Out of This World,* and 30 stories—much of *This Magazine is Haunted,* 21 stories of *The Many Ghosts of Dr. Graves,* the title to *Fantastic Giants* and material therein, various war, mystery, and crime stories."

John Lustig, Steve Sibra & Ron Church

A large percentage of the Charlton comic books published throughout its existence were in the romance genre and thus probably the majority of material sold. "My purchase was in December of 1997, and I paid $400 for 40 issues of *First Kiss*," cartoonist John Lustig said. "I purchased that series—sight unseen—because it was the most issues for my money. It seemed nobody wanted romance comics. I sent Charlton a check in December they sent a contract back, and I signed it [*reproduced in CBA #11's letter column*]. I was still interested in purchasing more properties, and on January 21, 1988, I tried to purchase additional material, and sent a money order for several properties. At some point, I had signed a contract and, a few days later, I got my money order back with a check from Ed Konick that there had been a mix-up and the rest of Charlton's properties had been sold."



Lustig is currently re-dialoguing *First Kiss* artwork in a satirical vein, running it as a strip titled *Last Kiss* in *Comics Buyer's Guide* and as a comic book special published by Shanda Fantasy Arts.

Two of Lustig's friends who said they also purchased Charlton properties are comic book retailers Ron Church and Steve Sibra. Church said he purchased *High School Confidential Diaries* #1 through #17 on November 10, 1987 for a sum of $300. Church now runs Corner Books in Kenmore, Washington as well as *bookinusa*, an Internet comic book store. Church said, "I purchased the rights to *Cynthia Doyle, Nurse in Love, Pictorial Love Stories, Frank Merriwell at Yale*, and also *The Lawbreakers/Lawbreakers Suspense* story run." Sibra said: "That might not have been all [*that remained in the inventory*], but I know for sure that I purchased those four. I never had any real plans for what I was going to do with them, and I still don't, exactly. They were affordable, and I purchased them because I would get file copies along with them. They were sold relatively inexpensively so I wasn't worried what they would cost me. I didn't have any firm

Bill Black Remembers

AC Comics' Publisher recalls Charlton

Originally, I acquired the rights to publish the Charlton super-heroes of the 1960s through my dealings with Bill Pearson. In the 1970s Pearson was editing *witzend* with Wallace Wood which was one of the most prestigious prozines of that era. I was publishing under the Paragon Publications banner churning out titles like *Fem Fantastique* and *Bizarre Thrills*. Pearson would write fan letters such as "*Bizarre Thrills* is both thrilling and bizarre..." so naturally we became buddies. We joined forces on *witzend* #11 and through this relationship with Pearson, I began corresponding with Woody, an artist I had greatly admired since I was a child. Pearson became assistant editor at Charlton under managing editor George Wildman. Soon I was drawing new covers for the Charlton Western comics, *Billy the Kid* and *Gunfighters*.

In 1979, young artist Dan Reed sought employment with Charlton pitching them on the idea of reviving their 1960s heroes such as Blue Beetle and Captain Atom. Despite his exuberance, Charlton declined but reconsidered when Danny said he would do the work for free. Dan's efforts, in my opinion, went a long way towards the establishing of the independent comic book market that would arise in 1983. Pearson decided to create a "tryout" book named *Charlton Bullseye* (after the very excellent house organ 'zine, *Charlton Bullseye*, edited by CPL/Gang's Bob Layton). The CPL book had printed previously unpublished inventory stories of *Blue Beetle* and *Captain Atom* as illustrated by Steve Ditko and, in the case of the Captain newly-inked by John Byrne.) The new comic book *Bullseye* premiered with a new Blue Beetle adventure written and penciled by Dan Reed. The cover was inked by top pro Bob McLeod and I inked one of the interior pages. This title ran 10 issues before Charlton pulled the plug.

The cancellation put Bill Pearson in a tough position as he had, by then, promised to get many aspiring comic book hopefuls published. Not wanting to disappoint them, he began calling around various publishers trying to find a new home for some 250 pages of completed material. When he phoned me and I told him that I was expanding Paragon into a new color line, he realized that the Charlton heroes had found a second home. I then entered into a contract with the powers-that-be at Charlton who allowed my new company, AC Comics, the rights to the Charlton characters for one year.

This was a wonderful opportunity for me, not because I was infatuated with the Charlton characters, but because it set me up with a talent pool for AC Comics. In 1983 AC published an anthology title called *Americomics* which showcased new characters, mostly of my creation, and the Charlton heroes. #3 starred the Ted Cord Blue Beetle written and penciled by Rik Levins (who wrote/drew The Shade and Sentinels of Justice for me as well as eight issues of his original creation, *Dragonfly*) and a Golden Age Blue Beetle story by writer Neil Stanard and artist Leo Laney. Martin L. Greim wrote and drew an Atomic Mouse adventure and the team of Dan St. John (writer) and Greg Guler (artist) produced a book-length adventure that teamed up Blue Beetle, Captain Atom, Nightshade, and The Question for the first time (*Americomics Special* #1). Dan Reed produced a Captain Atom story which he had slated for *Bullseye*. Upon hearing of the cancellation of the title, he decided to change the ending so that evil alien invaders destroy the earth, Captain Atom and all the other Charlton heroes as well. However Dan's revisions caused him to be so late with his submission that it did not make the deadline and remains unpublished to this day. There are other Blue Beetle stones by both Levins and Laney, a Vengeance Squad book, and a Hercules story as yet unpublished.

Rik Levins moved to Florida to work at AC as did Mark Heike who had contributed to *Charlton Bullseye* as well. After *Dragonfly* folded, Rik worked at Marvel for many years and I believe, holds the art record for the greatest number of *Captain America* issues produced. Today Rik is still in Florida and designs video games such as the very popular *Duke Nukem*. Marty Greim relaunched the MU heroes at Archie during the early 1980s, created and wrote Thunder Bunny for several issues (and for several publishers!) and still writes for comics today. Greg Guler did *Nexus* for the now defunct First Comics and had a 30-plus issue run on *Hawk and Dove* at DC. Today he works for Disney in California. Paul Ryan, whose *Bullseye* creation, Breed, was published in AC's title *Starmasters*, has had a thriving career drawing *Fantastic Four, The Flash, Superman* and many others.

Dan Reed did *Indiana Jones* at Marvel in the 1980s and started his own shortlived indy company, Blazer Comics, in the 1990s. His work can be seen in *Big Bang Comics* at Image [*see Dan's interview on page 102*]. Mark Heike has been associate editor here at AC for a decade. His long comics career includes stints on *Green Hornet, Star Trek, Nexus, Star Wars, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Spy Boy, Mantra* and *Xena*. He inked *Femforce* at AC for ten years and wrote, penciled and/or inked many, many AC features making him a valued asset to the organization.

Sales on the Charlton characters were disappointing. I think that at the time comics readers were looking for something new rather than the rehashing of old characters that they didn't much care for the first time around. The new AC characters such as Black Diamond far outsold the Charlton books. I also entered into an agreement with Pete Morisi to publish his *Peter Cannon—Thunderbolt*, but cancelled-out when sales slid. Charlton itself folded its tent in 1987. Robin Snyder, acting as agent for the company, sold properties to AC Comics and others. AC published *Nyoka The Jungle Girl, Rocky Lane*, and *Billy the Kid* and still today helps keep the Charlton characters alive although the super-heroes went to DC.

A False Start at Charlton Comics

The trials and tribulations of T.C. Ford: Missing the Bullseye

by T.C. Ford

Charlton Comics was one of the earliest comic companies I became aware of as a youngster—in fact, one of the first comic books I ever purchased was *Abbott & Costello* #2, off the newsstand in Bridgeport, Connecticut around 1968.

Years later, I came to be one of a group of apprentices for Dick Giordano and Frank McLaughlin, initially working on a guidebook for Special Olympics which was designed in comics format. During this period the fan press reported that Charlton Comics, which had been putting out only reprinted material for awhile, announced they would be accepting unpaid-for material (actually, it was material compensated with contributor copies) for a new comic title, to be named *Charlton Bullseye*—apparently named after a former fanzine put out by the CPL/Gang. My first published work, "The Jungle," a one-page "turnabout" style story hastily inked on the train from Bridgeport to Derby (Charlton's home) was selected for *Charlton Bullseye* #4.

Above: *Amanda Conner's 1986 cover for the aborted* Charlton Bullseye Special #1. *Courtesy of and ©2001 T.C. Ford.*

In late 1985, I started to put together a small line of black-& white comics titles under my imprint, Total Comics Group, and I thought it would be an interesting idea to see if I could get permission to use some of the Charlton characters still left over after DC Comics' recent buyout of the "Action Hero" characters (Captain Atom, Blue Beetle, The Question, Sarge Steel, Peacemaker, Son Of Vulcan, Judomaster, Nightshade, as well as a character owned by Pete Morisi, Peter Cannon—Thunderbolt). That idea turned into something more exciting. Some of the powers-that-be at Charlton were still interested in seeing what they could do with the remaining characters, and encouraged me to make up a proposal for a new comic.

At the same time, there were others in charge who wanted to see if there was interest in outside companies wanting to purchase any of the remaining characters, and to that end they secured Robin Snyder to represent them as an independent agent. Fantagraphics had acquired one-time reprint rights to Charlton's *Doomsday +1* series under this arrangement. When I found out about this, I asked how this would affect my proposal and was told that it wouldn't. Snyder would not be allowed to offer for sale any characters I planned to feature, as long as I put together a list. They said they would also notify me if material was about to be sold, just to double-check.

My proposal to Charlton was accepted. I would produce black-&-white, direct sale-only titles out of my studio in Bridgeport, acting as Executive Editor (Charlton did not want to put the new line on the newsstands because they felt this would put them in direct competition with Comico, whom they were distributing via their newsstand Capital Distributing arm). My studio would get paid royalties with an advance, which would then be used to pay our talent and other expenses. I put together three projects: *Charlton Bullseye Special*, a quarterly series designed to introduce readers to the new and established characters we would be publishing; *Return of the Vengeance Squad*, a team that was a personal favorite of mine (with art done by Amanda Conner, Steve Montano and Tom Christopher); and *FORCE and the Hero Network*, a title featuring two different super-hero teams.

Charlton liked the results enough to send me out to Las Vegas to attend the IADD distributors meeting to promote the line. I received a lot of positive feedback, enough so I felt confident enough to go ahead with developing projects based on *Atomic Mouse*, *Yang*, *Fightin' Five*, and the mystery/horror characters, to run in *Bullseye Special*. Charlton gave me the okay to use Sleepeck Printing (also used by Comico), because there had been concern among the fans and retailers about the quality of Charlton's printing presses. Fantagraphics reported in one of their *Doomsday +1* reprints that Charlton's presses were previously used to print cereal boxes, and weren't of the best quality. Using an outside printer, I reckoned, would increase reader confidence in the new Charlton line.

Then the problems started. Writers and artists would call me with some new rumor on a weekly basis. Characters were being sold! Did that mean Charlton was going out of business? No, I said, and explained to them that characters being sold were not a part of my publishing plans. Then Spotlight Comics, a publisher doing new *Underdog* and *Mighty Mouse* comics (also being distributed to newsstands through Capital) announced that *they* had the rights to do new Charlton material, putting my talent in a tizzy until I found out that someone at Spotlight had made a proposal which was rejected, their announcement premature (since they were never given rights to anything). But the situation caused some of my talent to cease working until they had "proof" that the rumor was false, which started to put us behind schedule.

The end, for me, came in the form of two articles—one, which was published in the *New Haven Register*, misquoting a person at Charlton saying the new comic line might never happen (based on an off-handed comment as was explained to me as being more like, "If the material doesn't come in by deadline, it might not come out at all." The material was in by deadline, but the reporter stuck with her quote). I was interviewed for the article, and showed the reporter samples of the material, and all the while she kept asking questions along the line of, "Isn't Charlton going out of business?" and "Isn't it true that the stores aren't supporting the comics?" I explained to her we were launching something new, and despite the last Charlton go-round (which didn't do very well on the newsstand), we were positive stores would support the new material. I even gave her the name of a local store who wanted to arrange a signing. She made me look like the only person who believed in the new line, with the exception of the local comics store owner, whom she did interview. The other article, which appeared in *The Comic Buyer's Guide*, indicated that *all* of Charlton's properties were for sale, including characters I was assured exclusive use. Robin Snyder was quoted in the article as having said this, and so I called him directly to find out what was going on, but was unable to get a return call. Eventually, I approached the gentlemen at the Charlton offices, who indicated the statement was essentially true. I resigned on the spot, since I didn't want to produce new material for characters that may be purchased away as soon as they were published. I made an offer for rights to *The Vengeance Squad* and asked for 30 days to allow me to purchase the rights, to which they agreed. Upon returning, I discovered the remaining material had been purchased in total by a Canadian publisher, Roger Broughton, currently reprinting Charlton material under his ACG imprint.

It is my understanding that Charlton did publish *Bullseye Special* #1 in a small quantity on their own presses, but I never received a copy, so I have no proof. The Charlton offices are now a strip mall, so I can't confirm if they did or didn't print it. The material I created during my time at Charlton remains under my ownership, as part of my original contract. I am launching new projects this year under my United Comics/Obsidian Comicworks imprints, and eventually the former Charlton material will be seen. Check my United Comics website (http://www.bcity.com/unitedcomics) for details.

plans, and I still don't. The novelty of it appealed to me as much as anything."

Sibra believes he spent between $1,100 to $1,200 for his purchases. Sibra, who is currently selling comic books on eBay, stresses that although he got file copies of *Registered Nurse* (a reprint book featuring the romance character Cynthia Doyle), he states he does not own the rights to any other stories reprinted in that title.

Roger Broughton/ACG Comics

"I heard through the grapevine that the material was for sale," Broughton, who is publisher of ACG Comics, recalled. "I ended up buying a few things, the first purchase was *Atomic Mouse*, and "The Lonely War of Willie Schultz" [*a war serial from* Fightin' Army]. There were some interesting properties there. They weren't selling the superhero stuff, but there was kind of a moratorium put on them for a short time. Part of it was the fact that I was having problems getting information back [*from Charlton*] because I was going through this third party. I think that after about a month, I ended up calling [*Charlton publisher*] John Santangelo, Jr. and saying bluntly 'What are your plans, and are you planning on selling the material or not?' He said 'Sure, why not?' I said 'How about this. Why don't we set up a meeting and I'll come down.' Basically, I drove down from Montreal to Connecticut and sat down with everybody. We had a deal and, in a couple of hours, it was done."

According to Broughton, his purchase entailed most every Charlton title save for the Action Heroes and a few other exceptions. "I purchased pretty much everything, with the exclusion of the superhero material," Broughton said. "That was pretty much it. I discovered afterwards that there were some back-door deals done that I don't think Charlton knew about. We've always had these little things that have been plaguing us for the last 10 or 12 years."

There are some conflicts between Broughton's claim and claims of others. For example, Broughton insists *First Kiss* is on his inventory list, while John Lustig says he rightfully bought the property.

"It turned out, I was missing one of my stats [*to* First Kiss]," Lustig said. "I was missing the stats for #35, and had the stats for #35 of another romance series instead. I tracked Roger down, and said, 'Hey, maybe you've got one of my stats, and maybe I've got one of your stats.' I was astonished to find out that Roger felt he owned not only his material, but *my* material and *Ron* and *Steve's*, as well. Needless to say, we did not exchange anything at that point. That was my last contact with Roger."

"That's another deal that was done backdoor," Broughton said of Lustig's acquisition of *First Kiss*. ". . . I got a set of material here. To be honest with you, I don't think Charlton got any money on that. I'm certain he paid for something, but I wonder if Charlton ever saw the money. I don't think it's an issue for me to go to war over. The only problem is that there is some material that's been reprinted, and we may eventually wind up butting heads on that. Love comics being what they are right now, and I understand that he's putting out an issue . . . [*though*] *First Kiss* is definitely on my list of purchases."

"We sold *First Kiss* to John Lustig," Snyder said. "It is wholly his by the terms of the sale."

"The sale was effective January 1, 1988," Lustig said, citing a *Comics Buyer's Guide* article on Broughton's purchases. "I want to stress very strongly that my purchase of material was in December [*1987*] a month before [*Broughton's acquisition*]."

Another point of conflict is in the work produced by comics legend Steve Ditko for Charlton. According to Bill Black, Snyder had already looked through the available inventory when he got to the list. "Robin Snyder made up lists of everything that was available. By the time I got it, he had cherry-picked all the Ditko stuff out of it, because he and Ditko are real close."

"We purchased the Ditko material," Broughton stated. "Along with all the rest, he's one of many who did work at Charlton. The works that [*Ditko*] did are work-for-hire."

Broughton expresses suspicion of certain Ditko material that has emerged on the market. "There was a fair amount of file copies and little artwork. From what I understand, a lot of artwork was still there and, to my understanding, that material ended up going out West. There's no way I can prove that. There might have been some Ditko stuff in there, and some stuff that popped up in conventions. I know basically who got it and took it. What can you do?"

Broughton also claims ownership of Rog-2000 and *Doomsday +1*, both properties Fantagraphics licensed from Charlton for a limited time. Kim Thompson, Fantagraphics co-publisher, said his company places no claim on either property. Broughton does not place a claim on Pete Morisi's creation Johnny Dynamite, saying that Terry Beatty and Max Allan Collins "definitely own everything, 100% about it." [*See Terry Beatty's letter of comment in* CBA *#11.*]

Although Broughton says he purchased stats to some of the Simon & Kirby comic books published by Charlton, such as *Bullseye*, he promptly turned them over to Joe Simon. "Roger Broughton [*is*] a nice fellow... [*He*] sent me the books *personae gratis*," Simon said.

The Copyright Situation

"Mike Curtis from Shanda Fantasy Arts was in contact with Roger a few months ago, because he was trying to purchase a property that Roger supposedly owned," John Lustig said. "In the course of exchanging e-mails, my name came up because of *Last Kiss*, and Roger acknowledged that I had purchased the material, but said that it was still supposed to be his . . . [because] it was listed on his inventory. As a result of that conversation, and the fact that I was going ahead with the comic book coming out in February, I decided to do a copyright search, to make sure that Roger hadn't tried to file copyright for *First Kiss* material. In the course of that, I talked to two lawyers, and the people at Library of Congress, and did an unofficial on line search. What I found out was that it appears that virtually all of Charlton's material is in the public domain. What I found out was through an online search that is not legally binding, but seems to coincide with everybody else I've talked to."

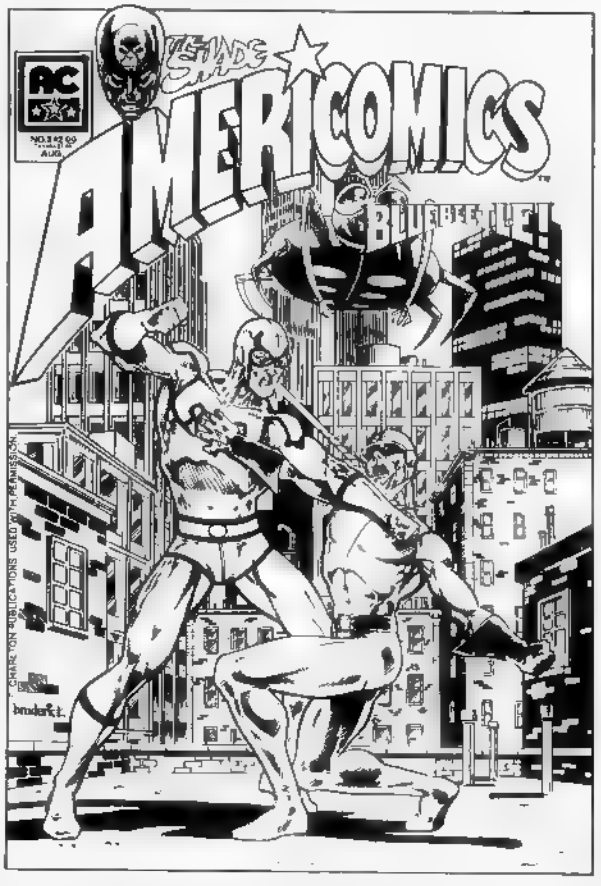
In order for something to be copyrighted, it does not have to be registered with the copyright office, but at least needs a proper copyright notice. According to Lustig, there are two different copyright notices on issues of *First Kiss*.

"Charlton, at least on my series, started out with a proper copyright through issue #8," Lustig elaborated. "All of a sudden, they switched to a different copyright notice, which two lawyers have said is invalid and automatically puts the material in public domain. There doesn't seem to be any reason other than sheer incompetence, frankly, for doing that. Their copyright notice after issue #8 states 'International copyright secured,' which is invalid, and it is without a date as well."

In order to secure a copyright, back at the time *First Kiss* was published (before the 1976 Copyright Act), the comic book would have had to be published with a proper copyright notice. After 28 years, the copyright notice would become eligible for renewal. However, if the copyright notice was insufficient (as is apparently the case with the later issues of *First Kiss*), the holder would have five years after publication to correct any omissions or errors in notice. For example, if a comic book from 1963 had an incorrect notice, the publisher would have until 1968 to correct the notice; if the notice was not corrected, that comic book would slip into the public domain.

"With respect to what was sent to me, those notices that were placed on comic books don't contain the 'magic language' required for copyright," Intellectual Properties attorney Michael Lovitz said after viewing the differing copyright statements from issues of *First Kiss*.

EDITOR'S NOTE:
A letter from our Chi-town pal, retro artist extraordinaire **Mitch O'Connell** *reminded us that he contributed to Charlton in the early 1980s (during its brief non-reprint period in that decade) when he was attending art school. "Payment was made in free copies," Mitch wrote, "but the real reason, of course, was to see your drawings in print." The artist also included two letters from Charlton assistant editor Bill Pearson. In March 1981, Bill wrote Mitch that a story submitted by the artist was too gory and "precisely the type of thing that brought in the Comics Code in 1954. . . we need scary stories, not horror stories."*



Above: *Pat Broderick's nifty cover art for Bill Black's Americomics #3, featuring two Blue Beetles duking it out. Courtesy of Bill Black. Characters ©2001 DC Comics.*

EDITOR'S NOTE:
We planned to include interviews with Charlton assistant editors **Bill Pearson** *and* **John Wren** *but circumstances stymied us. After false starts on my part, I submitted a last-minute e-mail Q&A to Bill but hadn't received his answers by presstime. Frank McLaughlin helped us find John Wren, who took the position in Derby after Bill left, but phone messages were not returned. We did try! If possible we'll run Pearson's Q&A next ish.*

EDITOR'S NOTE:

We sincerely wish we could have included **Daniel R. St. John**'s *reminiscences in this ish (written for us last Spring by the comics writer) about his 1980s Charlton Bullseye project, The Sentinels of Justice which was never published by the company because the comic book anthology was cancelled. But his story, drawn by Greg Guler and featuring Captain Atom, Blue Beetle, Nightshade, and The Question, did eventually see print through Bill Black's AC Comics. If there's room, we'll try to fit it in next issue's letters section. Thank you, Dan, and we appreciate your contribution and understanding that we simply ran out of room on this bulging-at-the-seams issue.*

"Absent that necessary language, they would not have requirements of copyright statute with respect to notice. The specific statute required all copies of work to contain a notice that included the word copyright, year of publication, and name of the copyright owner. Nowhere does it have that kind of notice. It does contain elements required, but it does not have notice in the form required."

"Under the statute at that time, this particular issue would be thrust into the public domain. If some issues had the proper copyright notice, they would be protected, assuming the notices [*are correct*]."

Lovitz did stress, however, that his opinion was only formed on the copyright notices faxed to him, and that the issues would be valid if a proper copyright notice appeared elsewhere in the book, which according to Lustig, does not.

How does the *First Kiss* situation bode for other Charlton properties? According to former Charlton General Manager Ed Konick, the publisher intentionally did not copyright their romance books because they were "not worth copyrighting." Konick cited the fact that the romance books did not generally feature a recurring character or plot, since many were anthology titles.

Supposing the *First Kiss* copyright on the first eight issues are copyrighted in a valid manner, that would hypothetically grant Lustig the copyright on those eight issues and any characters included therein, as well as a trademark on the *First Kiss* title. Also, if anyone were to try to create a new *First Kiss*, they could not do it as a continuation of the final, uncopyrighted issue.

For example, supposing *Blue Beetle* was not copyrighted properly through Charlton past #1, and #2 through #5 were not properly copyrighted, DC Comics could claim copyright on #1, and could reprint #2-5 (all four of which would be in the public domain). However, DC would not be able to do a new #6 that followed directly off of the public domain #5. A small company, though, could legally reprint #2-5, since that would be fair use of public domain material. DC could also claim copyright on any *new* Blue Beetle material they would have printed.

"You can't yank something out of the public domain if you're reprinting it," Lovitz surmised. "All you would be entitled to are the changes you have made."

"Trademarks can stay alive if used often," Lovitz said. "Even if all *First Kiss* comic books are in the public domain, but [*Charlton*] continues to use the trademark actively, I couldn't use the *First Kiss* trademark without permission. I can have fair use of the trademark if done properly, and if it is clear that it is not the original. You must do it in a way that doesn't imply you are creating a new work."

Below: *Amanda Conner's depiction of a revamped* Vengeance Squad, *one of T.C. Ford's unrealized Charlton titles, now to be called* Team Danger. *©2001 T.C. Ford*

Lustig's *Last Kiss* material is copyrightable however as a derivative work of something in the public domain—*First Kiss*. Lovitz emphasized that once something is in the public domain, it can not be renewed or copyrighted. The only exception would be if, following the Berne Convention that the United States joined in 1989, the improperly noticed material was printed *outside* the United States (which was not the case with Charlton, who printed most of their comics on premises in Derby, Connecticut).

"According to my contract with Charlton, I have ownership of all the material. The term they used, which I didn't pick up on at the time, was 'all existing rights.'" Lustig emphasized the copyright loophole in his contract means that 'all existing rights' does not necessarily denote the material is, in fact, copyrighted.

"Much of the work was in public domain when we sold it," Snyder said, "which is why we specifically included the line 'any and all rights.' Because of the uncertainty of copyright, we threw in as much corollary material as possible—negatives, file copies, promotional work, stats, and so forth."

Lustig's discovery of the *First Kiss* copyright status led to discovering that another former Charlton property may also reside in the public domain. Lustig said: "The property that Mike Curtis was contacting Roger about, was an old series called *Atomic Mouse*. Mike loves Atomic Mouse, and he wants to do a new... series, [*but*] he doesn't just want to reprint it. He contacted Roger to see about buying the rights from Roger [*who reportedly declined the offer*]. ... Mike has done a formal Library of Congress Copyright Office search and has found that Atomic Mouse is definitely in the public domain, he has the documentation. Mike is going to go ahead and publish an Atomic Mouse series."

"I started nosing about here and there, and heard rumors that a lot of this might be public domain," Curtis told. "I invested a little money, and did a [*Library of Congress*] copyright search. I got some papers back [*reference #2001000369*] that said that from [*Charlton publisher John*] Santangelo, [*Charlton editor and Atomic Mouse creator*] Al Fago, and Charlton, none of them copyrighted it. Never copyrighted. They have no records from '46 to [*Nov. 17*] 2000. Yes, we did receive confirmation that it was never copyrighted."

Could Curtis legally do a new *Atomic Mouse* series? If the character has always been—or has reverted—in the public domain, it appears possible. "We renewed the material in Canada, because we had a longer copyright," Broughton said of the copyright status of his Charlton properties, also citing a group renewal. "We did a transfer then. I'm starting to realize that there's certain stuff that needs to be done previously to that. Since the material copyrights needed to be renewed, after 1976, there is some automatic renewal that falls into place right now. I realize that there may be some stuff we may have slacked on to a certain degree. We did transfer stuff in Canada, and it's a matter of shuffling some paperwork. We're part of the Geneva Convention, since I'm in another country. We're a little different. I've had a case where people have tried to jump my material because they said 'We went to the Library of Congress on that.' The Library of Congress is very clear that their research is not necessarily conclusive."

According to the Library of Congress/U.S. Copyright Office Web page, a transfer of exclusive copyright between two parties is not valid unless "that transfer is in writing and signed by the owner of the rights conveyed or such owner's duly authorized agent." But former Charlton General Manager Ed Konick said, "We didn't license [*Broughton*] any formalized licensing where we sold him formal copyrights on anything. He just bought artwork. It may be that, at that point in time, we owned all of those titles that he picked up. It was mostly romance titles, because we had sold the super-heroes, and when you limit those two, I don't know what other categories would be left over. At that time, we didn't have any licenses with people like Hanna-Barbera, FilmTel and Universal. We had given those all up. We could have sold him the copyrights if we wanted to, I suppose, but I don't recall any formalization of selling Roger Broughton copyrights. I know he picked up artwork and he paid us, but I don't recall how much. It was just like a house cleaning operation. He drove down in his car from Canada, loaded his trunk, and drove back." Konick verified not seeing Broughton copyright on the following day, after saying he looked through his records.

While Broughton declares his Charlton purchases entailed "all rights, without limitations," there is the possibility that "all rights" may have excluded a non-existent copyright. There is also clearly the possibility that his purchase of artwork was misunderstood as a copyright sale. Whatever the case, perhaps this copyright morass is indicative of Charlton's neglect too often given to its comics in nearly every aspect of their production—in the often shoddy printing, moronic issue numbering, heartless destruction of original artwork, and the present ownership confusion, leaving those who care about the comics of Charlton one awfully big mess to clean up.

Charlton SPOTLIGHT

Exploring the History of the Charlton Comics Group • Number 1 • Fall 2000 • $6.95

remembering

Pat Boyette

"A wonderful magazine."—**Roy Thomas**

"Thanks for the lovely first issue of what is already one of my favorite magazines." **Mark Evanier**

Charlton Spotlight explores the wonderful, weird, and wacky world of the **Charlton Comics Group.** Through interviews, memoirs, reviews, surveys, checklists, and commentary, we will examine the entire rainbow range of Charlton's comics line, from ***Abbott and Costello*** to ***Zoo Funnies*** and everything in between.

Issue #1 is a special tribute to the life and work of the late, great **Pat Boyette!** Join **Joe Gill, Steve Skeates, Alex Toth, Ron Frantz, Jim Amash, Bill Pearson,** and others as they remember Pat and his unforgettable legacy in comics, with a brand new front cover by **Tom Sutton,** back cover by **Jim Amash,** an extensive Boyette checklist by **Don Mangus,** a Boyette cover gallery – and a complete Charlton Comics title/date checklist!

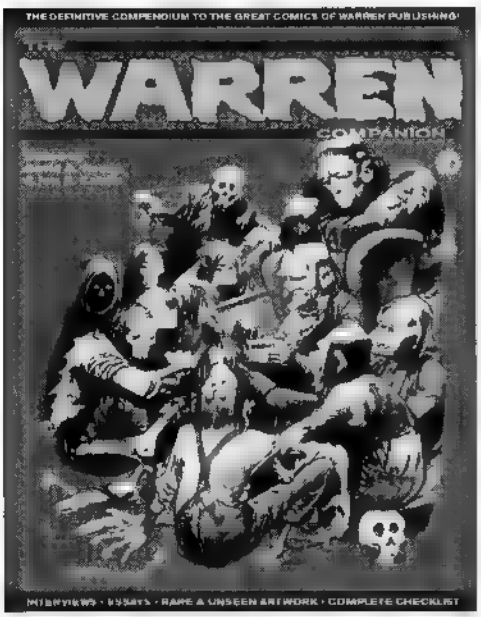
Charlton Spotlight is 48 black-and-white, 8½x11" pages, loaded with Charlton covers and classic, rarely seen, and unpublished artwork by **Pat Boyette!**

Only $6.95 per copy
postage-paid to the U.S. ($7.50 Canada, $12.00 air mail to the rest of the world) in U.S. funds only, payable to

Argo Press • P.O. Box 4201 • Austin, TX • 78765
mikeargo@flash.net

CHARLTON GROUP COMICS

CREEPING YOUR WAY IN JUNE!



Above: *Just a clever mock up and not the final cover to* The Warren Companion. *Our deception uses Jack Davis' classic image from Creepy #1 ©1965 Warren Publications.*

WARREN COMPANION

The ultimate reference guide to Warren Publishing! Few publishers throughout history can boast the extraordinary work of as many great artists and writers as Warren, and this book features

- New painted cover by **ALEX HORLEY!**
- A complete reprinting of the out-of-print, Eisner Award-winning **COMIC BOOK ARTIST #4** (totally reformatted)!
- **UNPUBLISHED ART, ARCHIVAL PHOTOS,** and looks at Warren's competition!
- Dozens of **NEW INTERVIEWS AND FEATURES** covering Warren's history from 1956 to 1983!
- The most definitive **WARREN CHECKLIST** ever compiled, with artists and writers cross-indexed!
- Coverage of **CREEPY, EERIE, VAMPIRELLA, BLAZING COMBAT, HELP!, THE SPIRIT,** & more!

Plus exhaustive details on Warren merchandise, conventions, top strips, most prolific contributors, foreign publications, and many other fascinating oddities! Also featuring new articles on **RICHARD CORBEN, FRANK FRAZETTA, STEVE DITKO** and others and interviews with **BERNIE WRIGHTSON, JIM WARREN, WILL EISNER, NEAL ADAMS, GENE COLAN** and many more

Edited by JON B. COOKE • 288 pages • SOFTCOVER: $29.95, LIMITED EDITION HARDCOVER: $49.95 + shipping • Ordering Details Next Issue!

TwoMorrows. Bringing New Life To Comics Fandom.

VISA MasterCard

TwoMorrows • 1812 Park Dr. • Raleigh, NC 27605 USA • 919-833-8092 • FAX: 919-833-8023 • e-mail: twomorrow@aol.com • www.twomorrows.com

Cuti of the Cosmos

continued from page 45

many genres and when I got into comics, I found out it was, like, 99% super-heroes. It had taken over and I really resented that. I felt, "Where are the Westerns? Where are the war books? Where are the romance titles? Where were the horror stories?" So I enjoyed working for Charlton because they had *all* the genres. They failed at super-heroes although making attempts a number of times because they couldn't compete with Marvel and DC, even though their super heroes were pretty clever and off-beat. There was nothing wrong with them. It's just that when you have Marvel and DC that's where you go when you're looking for a super-hero. When you're looking for an occasional ghost comic, *then* you go for Charlton.

CBA: *Did you get back any art from Charlton?*

Nick: Charlton's policy was that after the art was shot, it was brought downstairs to where all of the presses were, where all of the machines were, and it would be shredded. And so all of the artwork was put into the shredder. Occasionally, some artwork, somehow, got misdirected and avoided the shredder and somehow managed to find its way back to the original artist who had done it. But I won't say how *that* happened.

CBA: *That's a sad state of affairs in the mid-'70s for that to be taking place while a lot of other creators were fighting for their right to get their artwork back from the Big Two.*

Nick: Oh, absolutely.

CBA: *Was that ever a concern for the artists? Did they request it, other than a special story. For instance, did Wally hold on to his originals?*

Nick: Well, you know, in the beginning, the originals were stored in a building that was in downtown Derby. And so the reason for this shredding was because a lot of artists who had gotten their work back were selling it to the fans and Charlton felt that they were the actual owners of that artwork and it wasn't right for the artists to sell it to the fans and so they started the policy of shredding the artwork. But a lot of the artwork was stored in this building in Derby. I don't know if I told you that one about the gag I played on Woody one time, about him and Bill Pearson going over to the building in Derby, the one where all of the artwork was stored. It started when Bill came over to my house and told me he and Woody found themselves locked in the Derby building because they had stayed too long, looking at artwork. They had to climb to the roof where they flagged down a passerby who borrowed a ladder from a nearby fire department so they could climb down. I recalled a gag Woody had once pulled on a publisher, pretending to call the publisher from a police station and I decided turnabout is fair play. I called Woody and, disguising my voice, I pretended to be a cop. I said he and a confederate were seen possibly burglarizing the Derby building. Nervously, he swore his innocence. I asked who his accomplice was and he gave me Bill's name and address in a heartbeat. Covering the phone's mouthpiece, I whispered to Bill, "He ratted you out!" *[laughter]* Then I told Woody we were sending a police car for him and I hung up.

Above: *Example of Nick's illustration for a science-fiction magazine. (Sorry the illos on this spread are printed so small!) ©2001 the respective copyright holder. Courtesy of the artist.*

CBA: *When did you let Woody in on the gag?*

Nick: A few minutes later, after we finished laughing, Bill called Woody, who told him the police were about to arrest him and Bill might be next. That's when Bill told him it was me on the phone, not the police. Woody asked to speak to me. "I'll get you for this, Nick," he said, but unfortunately he never did. He died before he was able to carry out his friendly threat. I wonder to this day what he was planning for me because, knowing Woody, he was planning something. We were always playing gags on one another. *[laughter]*

CBA: *Ever wish you could have had helmsmanship of Charlton?*

Nick: Well, of course. Yeah, I would have loved it, but it wasn't my plan at all. George was doing an extremely competent job there.

CBA: *No, I don't mean that. I mean the possibility of you eventually achieving a position like George. You're a creative person.*

Nick: Oh, of course I would have done it my way, but that's what everyone does when they take over and I really hadn't considered or planned on it because I was just an editorial assistant. But, you know, if it was just handed to me, I would have loved it.

CBA: *But you obviously had an influence, notwithstanding your clandestine subterfuge of sneaking in Mike Zeck. [laughs]*

Nick: That was the only time I did that.

CBA: *I was just teasing. But, excepting vacations, did George send out every single story assignment?*

Nick: No, occasionally he would hand me a script and tell me, or even ask me, if I wrote a script, who I would like to illustrate it.

CBA: *So, what year did you part ways at Charlton?*

Nick: It would be the mid-'70s, the exact date I don't really recall.

CBA: *When you left, could you see the writing on the wall for the company? Did you realize Charlton was not going to be purchasing new material and become a reprint house?*

Nick: No, I didn't see that happening at all, to be honest with you. I thought it would just continue as it always had been.

CBA: *It was a surprise when you heard Joe Gill wasn't writing any more?*

Nick: Yeah, I was very surprised. Bill Pearson took over when I left Charlton and I'd recommended him for the job. And as I said, Bill and I have remained friends over the years.

CBA: *Was it very sudden when you left?*

Nick: Yeah, it was kind of sudden. It was under not good circumstances. Basically, it was another one of those famous publisher's meetings. The head accountant over at Charlton brought up to the publisher the fact that I was making so much money as an editor and then when I left to go as a freelancer, I had almost doubled my salary. They were very angry over that for some reason. Why, to this day, I have no idea. But they decided to cut me off. And so George Wildman called me in one day and took me out to lunch and told me. And that's how I left Charlton.

CBA: *Besides, obviously, your acting and production abilities, within the confines of comics themselves, do you see yourself as three distinct types: Editor, artist, and writer? Or is it all really just mixed up as one?*

Nick: Well, I'm more interested in being a writer and an artist. I've always dreamed of illustrating and writing my own comics. But I began to realize that as an artist, I was very limited. I just couldn't keep up the pace of doing comic books. The talent involved in doing a comic book is so unappreciated by the general public that it's pathetic. You have to create a character you can do over and over and over again without any variation. I would doubt if most of our top artists could do it. I doubt Norman Rockwell could have done it.

CBA: *But you do have the ability.*

Nick: I have the ability but it's not as slick as so many of the other great artists who are in the business.

CBA: *No, but perhaps there's a frustration of how far you could get with your actual drawing ability. You have the mindset of being able. You have actually accomplished that. E-Man, to this day, is a recognizable, memorable character.*

Nick: Yeah, but I didn't draw it. I wrote it.

CBA: *But you did everything but draw it, you know what I mean? You created it. I mean, comics are a unique form in contrast to, maybe, comic strips which are often written and drawn by cartoonists who are determined to be writers and artists. They do it both themselves and they singularly get it done. And in comic books, it's obviously a more collaborative effort, though it's arguable on both sides. It gets very fuzzy between the two but maybe I'm having a very awkward, roundabout way of complimenting you on your editorial abilities.*

Nick: Why, thank you.

CBA: *You've told me you could be a sassy-mouthed young man.*

Nick: Well, mostly to my bosses, not to the guys—the artists or writers—I liked them. And it's not that I disliked my bosses either. It's just that I've always had a problem with authority. *[laughs]*

CBA: *[laughs] Being so long in military service, one wonders why. Nick, why? But did you have ambition as an editor? Did you fantasize, for instance, about having your own magazines?*

Nick: Oh, absolutely. Of course, all the time.

CBA: *So you aspired to be a full-fledged editor yourself, where you could direct a book in particular directions?*

Nick: I suppose I did, at one time or another, sure. I suppose that thought more than once passed my mind, that I would edit a magazine or comic or something like that. But I think I just enjoyed doing the creating too much, and manipulating other people just wasn't my thing.

CBA: *It seems like the more I study it, the history of comics, the more I understand that there are pretty much two basic types of editors, and one could be like Mort*

Weisinger or Jim Shooter—a very strong presence—and then there's the more laid-back yet creative of Dick Giordano, Weezie Simonson, or Archie Goodwin, in which they let the artists or the writer really perform for them, in a sense.

Nick: Absolutely, absolutely, those are very good examples.

CBA: *You seemed to have that same quality.*

Nick: Well thank you, I appreciate being told that, I never realized it. If anything, it was because of a lot of the people I worked with, Archie Goodwin, Dick Giordano, guys like that, encouraged creativity as opposed to dictating it, like you said, and I guess some of that rubbed off on me, just from working with these guys and admiring them so much. I've been very fortunate to have worked with a lot of really, really good editors. My few run-ins with Jim Shooter have been rather negative, so I'd rather not go into that, but as far as the other editors I've worked with, they've all been really excellent.

CBA: *I'm probably immersed—perhaps more than any other researcher—in Charlton lore because of just the sheer volume of people that I've spoken to at great length about the company. I step away from it sometimes and realize perhaps 40% of the work you did was quite good and there was, arguably, 60% that was second-rate. But there was always an effort there.*

Nick: There was *always* an effort, Jon, believe me. We never tried to turn out schlock.

CBA: Every *publisher turns out schlock. It's the nature of the beast.*

Nick: I think Ted Sturgeon said, "90% of everything is crap," and he was right. There's just no way you can turn out quality at the rate that modern day demands it.

CBA: *Love of comics transcended to make an impact at Charlton.*

Nick: We were all at a convention and we were all up on the stand there, behind the table and people were throwing questions at us. Gerry Conway turned to me, and he said, "You know, these guys deserve a hand. *They* were the ones who were responsible for all the great artists who work at all the great companies. *They* were our proving grounds because these were guys who all worked for Charlton at one time."

My career in comics has been one of really just delight. I consider myself very honored to be able to have worked in the field with so many great people. You know what I mean? I worked with Wally Wood, I met Al Williamson, I met Jack Kirby, I've worked with Jack Kirby when I was over at DC, Dick Giordano was my boss, I worked under Joe Orlando. My name has never been circulated very much, because I think when you work with giants, you tend to get lost in their shadows, and that's about what it was.

CBA: *After your second tenure at Warren in the late-'70s and working at DC Comics in the 1980s [two aspects of Nick's career to be covered in the forthcoming Warren Companion], you've been working in television animation ever since?*

Nick: Yeah, I've been in animation. I still free-lance occasionally for comics, but not too much. Mostly I've been working in animation... as an artist, not as a writer. I'm background designer for animated cartoons. I love it.

CBA: *What production company?*

Nick: Well, I've worked for a lot, because I've been out here for almost 15 years. I've worked for a lot of studios. I've worked for Disney for a few years. I worked on *Gargoyles*, and I also worked on *101 Dalmatians* and *Jungle Cubs* for Disney—all television, not features—I've never worked on features. But I've worked for a lot of different companies. I did a thing called *Defenders of the Earth* for Marvel, with Flash Gordon, Mandrake and the Phantom. I've worked for a lot of different studios for a lot of different projects. I've worked on *Conan the Adventurer* for Graz Animation, and tons of different... I can't even remember all of them.

Above: *Sample of Nick's background work for TV animation. This is from the cartoon* Gargoyles. *©2001 Disney TV. Courtesy of Nick Cuti.*

Then one day I came up with a project called *Captain Cosmos, the Last Starveyer*, and this was *my* project. I figured I'd been working on other people's projects long enough, I wanted a project that would be entirely my own, and that was this science-fiction hero that I'm still working on to this day. I'm still doing *Captain Cosmos*, working on a series of audio adventures, a video, and I'm still doing comic books featuring the character. Joe Staton—who has a heart of gold—agreed to illustrate the comic for nothing. I eventually gave him half my profits, which is close to nothing. *[laughter]* I give him half the profits, but as I said, it's almost a joke, considering how much work he puts into it. I called up the people at Hamilton Publishing, because I had a good relationship with them, and they agreed to... they found a printing firm that would do it for a very low amount of money, and they did a lot of the editing for me, and they were great, they were wonderful. The first issue of *Captain Cosmos* was under their banner. The second issue was published by my brother, Emil, who started a printing firm out in Florida, so I felt obligated to give him some work, which turned out to be more of a headache than a help to him, and that was the second one, Ybor City Publishing. The third one will be out very soon.

CBA: *How did you feel about the low regard held for Charlton?*

Nick: Well, Charlton was the schlock company of all the comic book companies, but that didn't concern us because we enjoyed doing what we were doing. And a lot of some of the best people in the field got their starts at Charlton, including Dick Giordano. Neal Adams actually came to us to work on *Six Million Dollar Man*. A lot of it was just purely the freedom, the fact that DC and Marvel were so into their particular form of super-heroes, their formulas and continuities that if you were going to draw for DC, you would have to draw Superman or Wonder Woman just exactly the way that everyone else had always done it. Whereas at Charlton, you had almost total freedom to do whatever you want. You want to do a horror comic? You do it. You want to do an occasional super-hero? You can just slip into a horror book and do it. I mean, nobody cared.

CBA: *There's just no money for it. [chuckles]*

Nick: The money was really low but it was an opportunity for young artists who were just starting out to break into the field. Don Newton had actually sent his samples to both Marvel and DC and was turned down. So did Mike Zeck. They eventually started at Charlton. John Byrne went to us to get his start. And so many of them, it goes on and on about so many artists. Steve Ditko was always a regular at Charlton in spite of his other work. Because of the freedom, because of the fact that they could, pretty much, do what they want and Charlton was very forgiving. *[laughs]* So, yeah, we were a schlock outfit but we loved what we did. We weren't a schlock outfit in the way we turned out crap for the sake of making money. We turned out second-rate work because we were trying and we were beginners and we were just starting out.

CBA: *Do you look back on those days fondly?*

Nick: Very fondly. I look upon my entire career very fondly. I can't recall any really bad moments. Well, they *were* there, of course, but, in general, I loved working at Charlton. I liked the people I was working with and I admire them to this day. I think they're all great talents. No, I remember working at Charlton with great fondness.

CBA: *Would it be mischaracterizing to say you were a nice guy?*

Nick: I have no idea how I'm perceived. *[laughs]* Feedback is something you usually don't get in the industry mainly because people assume that you already know your position and we don't, you know what I mean? By "position," I mean the quality of our work and whether we're perceived as being professional or just someone who happens to be there and turning out the work. We don't know that and when we're told that by people, we're very suspicious. We feel that we're being flattered. So when a person comes up, the only way that I would believe something that someone said about my work would be if I accidentally overheard it. But if someone comes up to me and says, "I'm a great fan of your work," I think that they're saying that only because they just happened to have met me at that time.

CBA: *How would you rate the different aspects of your career? Are you as happy now in animation as you were at Charlton?*

Nick: Sure. That's like saying, "How would you rate your children?" I can't do that!

CBA: *But we can* ask! *[laughs]*

Nick: It's simply a matter of every aspect of my career has been different. Yeah, I've had my highs and lows, but in general, I've loved it all, including the lows.

CBA: *Are comics a primary component?*

Nick: It was a disappointment only because I was unable to make a success out of it for myself. I loved comics. To this day, I still publish my *Captain Cosmos* comic with Joe Staton. I've always loved comics; I always will. I enjoy doing animation, that's great. I love doing live action. I'm planning on doing more. I just bought an expensive camera and I'm going to be shooting some more *Captain Cosmos* episodes. No, I love my entire career. I also did illustrations for magazines. I did work for *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, Twilight Zone Magazine* but I loved doing that, too. I can't really say anything negative about anything I've done, including the underground comix.

CBA: *If you could have mapped out where you wanted to go within the field of comics, where might have that been?*

Nick: Oh, I suppose I would have liked to have been another Wally Wood, to come out with some innovative style that everyone would have gone agasp, mostly in the field of science-fiction. But as John Lennon put it beautifully, "Life is what happens when you're busy making other plans," and that's basically what it is.

Celebrating Four That Got Away

Steve Ditko, Wayne Howard, Sanho Kim, & Fred Himes

Above: *Page from Sanho Kim's three-volume magnum opus,* History of the Great Korean Empire, *a recent set published in the artist's homeland. Courtesy of Jim Vadeboncoeur, Jr. ©2001 the respective copyright holder.* **Inset:** *Steve Ditko's character design for the impish host of* Haunted. *©2001 the respective copyright holder.* **Bottom right:** *Courtesy of the late artist's son, here's a magazine illustration by Fred Himes. ©2001 the respective copyright holder.* **Below:** *One of Wayne Howard's many amusing gag covers for his* Midnight Tales, *a Charlton horror title. ©2001 the respective copyright holder.*

Sometimes it's agony putting together these theme issues of *CBA* as ye ed never can fit enough material in each edition to comprehensively "carpet bomb" any given subject. I mean, a Charlton retrospective was originally supposed to be included under a catch-all single-issue theme entitled "The Other Guys," featuring not only the Derby, Connecticut publisher, but Tower Comics *and* Atlas/Seaboard, as well! And in actuality we've devoted *two* issues—*over 200 pages*—to Charlton alone! And I'm still omitting important material about significant contributors to the company, to my great regret. Much as I wanted to include proper tributes to Steve Ditko, Wayne Howard, Sanho Kim and Fred Himes in this '70s ish, alas, t've only been able to wrestle out a (woefully insufficient) single page for the effort. But before you question my editorial judgment about, say, including a *second* Pete Morisi interview over devoting a spread to any of these—or other neglected—fine creators, please note, kind reader, that it was not for lack of giving it the old college try.

STEVE DITKO, certainly one of the greatest comics artists of all time (who produced reams of memorable work for Charlton in the '70s, especially horror material) is renowned for not giving interviews and was true to form on my request last year. Astute readers should specifically check out his "Killjoy" back-ups in a few issues of *E-Man*, a character the artist/writer has recently revived in his *Ditko Package Series, Vol. 4, 176-Page Package: Heroes* (published by Robin Snyder, ISBN #0-9673173-5-5, $16 in U.S. funds made payable to Lady Robin, 2284 Yew St. Rd., #B6, Bellingham, WA 98226-8899 USA—also check out the Charlton reprint volume in the series, *Vol. 3 160-Page Package: 20 Mystery Stories*, $13, ISBN #0-9673173-2-0. Tell R.S. *CBA* sent ya!).

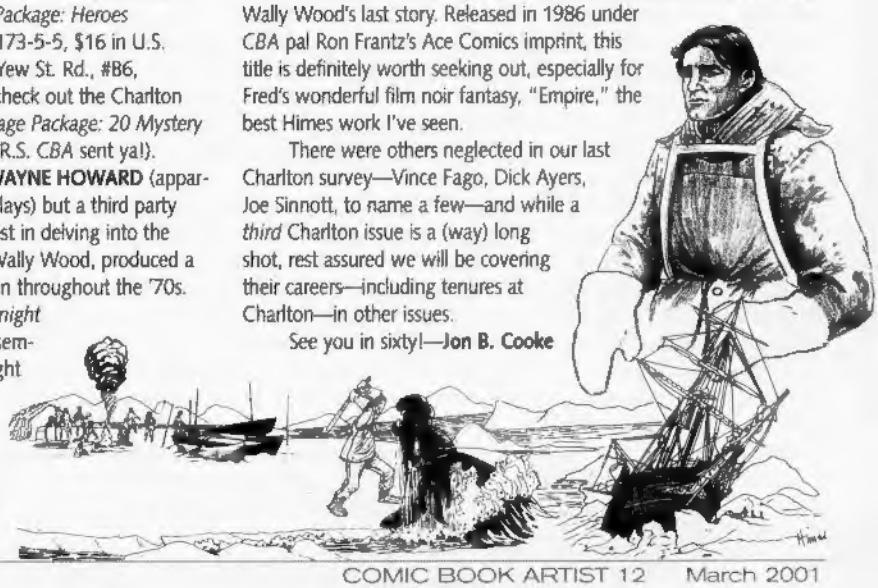
Every effort was made to notify **WAYNE HOWARD** (apparently still residing in Connecticut these days) but a third party indicated the artist/writer had no interest in delving into the past. Wayne, a one-time assistant of Wally Wood, produced a string of fine horror stories for Charlton throughout the '70s. He created the horror anthology *Midnight Tales* (featuring the Andy Warhol-resembling Professor Coffin—"The Midnight Philosopher"—and his bodacious assistant, Arachne, horror hosts who actively participated in many stories), a title boldly emblazoned with a "Created by Wayne Howard" blurb on each cover of its 18-issue run—a declaration perhaps unique in the industry at the time. And those gag *MT* covers by Wayne are great!

SANHO KIM apparently returned to his homeland in South Korea (still producing extraordinary work today, I must add) and the logistics of getting ahold of him proved insurmountable. But the artist/writer did great work for Charlton in the "Me Decade"—*House of Yang*, superb Western covers, and piles of horror stories. In 1973, Iron Horse Publishing produced the Kim drawn-and-scripted *Sword's Edge, Part One, The Sword & the Maiden*, a delightful Korean martial arts tale. Look for Sanho's completed 24-page first issue of his almost-Charlton title, *Wrong Country*—planned as a martial arts book—in *Charlton Bullseye* #3. Colleague Jim Vadeboncoeur e-mailed images from Sanho's ambitious *History of the Great Korean Empire*, and said there are currently three volumes (ISBN # 89-00-03633-5, 89-00-03634-3, 89-00-03635-1 respectively, and #89-00-03632-7, we assume, for the set). Jim wrote, "Sanho improved immensely over the course of the project. After all, we're talking almost 700 9" x 13" pages here."

Sadly, **FRED HIMES** passed away last year and my contact with his son, Fred Himes, Jr., dried up. (I had hoped to reprint a great 1977 newspaper article on Fred's comic book career but the photocopies received from his son did not indicate which paper it was originally printed in. Failing in efforts to contact Fred Jr.—and being extremely adverse to reprinting work wholesale *sans* permission—that option proved false, to my regret.) Fred primarily worked as a "bigfoot" cartoonist for Charlton (mostly on the Hanna-Barbera titles) but had memorable excursions drawing horror, romance, and war stories. Perhaps his most notable work for the company was his run on *Valley of the Dinosaurs*, another H-B license. A savvy entrepreneur, the artist teamed with fellow San Antonian and Charlton contributor Pat Boyette to edit and publish *The Cosmic Book*, an extraordinary, lushly colored comic featuring the work of Himes, Boyette, Alex Toth, and significantly featuring Wally Wood's last story. Released in 1986 under *CBA* pal Ron Frantz's Ace Comics imprint, this title is definitely worth seeking out, especially for Fred's wonderful film noir fantasy, "Empire," the best Himes work I've seen.

There were others neglected in our last Charlton survey—Vince Fago, Dick Ayers, Joe Sinnott, to name a few—and while a *third* Charlton issue is a (way) long shot, rest assured we will be covering their careers—including tenures at Charlton—in other issues.

See you in sixty!—**Jon B. Cooke**



TwoMorrows. Bringing New Life To Comics Fandom.

COMICOLOGY #1: (100 pages) The new magazine for MODERN COMICS fans, with a BRUCE TIMM cover, intv. & sketchbook, JEPH LOEB interview, LEA HERNANDEZ, MANYA, USAGI YOJIMBO, 60 years of ROBIN, & more!

COMICOLOGY #2: (100 pages) MIKE ALLRED interview and portfolio, 60 years of THE SPIRIT, 25 years of the X-MEN, PAUL GRIST interview and art, FORTY WINKS, new color ALLRED and GRIST covers, & more!

COMIC BOOK ARTIST #7: (132 pages) 1970s MARVELMANIA! BYRNE, GULACY, DAN ADKINS, RICH BUCKLER, STEVE GERBER, DOUG MOENCH, JIM MOONEY, DENIS KITCHEN, new GULACY cover & more!

CBA #9: (116 pages) THE CHARLTON COMICS STORY: PART ONE! DICK GIORDANO, PETER MORISI, JIM APARO, JOE GILL, FRANK MCLAUGHLIN, SAM GLANZMAN, new GIORDANO cover, and more!

CBA #10: (116 pages) WALTER SIMONSON: OLD GODS & NEW! Also, WOMEN OF THE COMICS! MARIE SEVERIN, RAMONA FRADON, TRINA ROBBINS, JOHN WORKMAN, new SIMONSON cover, and more!

CBA #11: (116 pages) ALEX TOTH AND SHELDON MAYER! TOTH interviews, art, appreciations, checklist, and more. Also, interviews with SHELLY MAYER'S kids, the real life inspiration for SUGAR & SPIKE!

The COMIC BOOK ARTIST COLLECTION, VOL. ONE: 224 page trade paperback reprints COMIC BOOK ARTIST #1-3, plus over 50 NEW PAGES of ADAMS, KIRBY, WRIGHTSON, JEFF JONES, & more!

ALTER EGO #1: (84 pages) ROY THOMAS' fanzine is back, all-new! STAN LEE, SCHWARTZ, ORDWAY, HASEN, H.G. PETER, FAWCETT COLLECTORS OF AMERICA, MR. MONSTER, color ORDWAY cover & more!

ALTER EGO #2: (100 pages) All-new THOMAS material! EISNER "SPIRIT" story, KANE, FOX & SCHWARTZ on The Atom, LARRY LIEBER & JACK BURNLEY intvs., KANIGHER, FCA, new color KANE & BURNLEY covers, more!

ALTER EGO #3: (100 pages) More all-new material by ROY THOMAS! ALEX ROSS cover & intv., JERRY ORDWAY, BILL EVERETT, CARL BURGOS, Giant FAWCETT section with C.C. BECK, SWAYZE, & more!

ALTER EGO #4: (100 pages) All-new salute: 60 years of HAWKMAN & FLASH! ROY THOMAS remembers GIL KANE, intvs. with KUBERT, MOLDOFF, LAMPERT, FOX, FCA with BECK & SWAYZE, KUBERT covers, & more!

ALTER EGO #5: (100 pages) Special JUSTICE SOCIETY issue! Intvs. with SHELLY MAYER, GIL KANE, MART NODELL, GEORGE ROUSSOS, FCA with BECK & SWAYZE, INFANTINO / ORDWAY wraparound cover, & more!

ALTER EGO #6: (100 pages) GENE COLAN intv., how-to books by STAN LEE and KANIGHER, ALL-STAR SQUADRON, MAC RABOY section, FCA with BECK & SWAYZE, COLAN and RABOY covers, & more!

ALTER EGO #7: (100 pages) A companion issue to the ALL-STAR COMPANION! SCHWARTZ intv., JLA-JSA teamups, more MAC RABOY, FCA with BECK & SWAYZE, BUCKLER and BECK covers, & more!

KIRBY CHECKLIST: Lists every Kirby comic, plus books, portfolios, unpublished work, cross-references reprints, & more! ! A must for Ebay™ shoppers! 100 pgs!

JACK KIRBY COLLECTOR #18: MARVEL issue! Intvs. w/ KIRBY, LEE, THOMAS, ROMITA, BUSCEMA, more! 68 pgs, Kirby/Sinnott cvr.

#20: WOMEN! KIRBY, DAVE STEVENS Intvs., LISA KIRBY, unused 10-page story, CAPT. VICTORY screenplay, more! 68 pages.

#21: KIRBY, GIL KANE, BRUCE TIMM intvs., LEE vs. KIRBY, SILVER STAR screenplay, unpubl. art, more! 68 pages.

KIRBY COLLECTOR #22: VILLAINS! KIRBY, RUDE, MIGNOLA intvs., FF #49 pencils, KOBRA, more! 68 pages, Kirby/Stevens cvr.

#23: Intvs. with KIRBY, DENNY O'NEIL, TRACY KIRBY, uninked FF #49 pencils, unused SOUL LOVE story, more! 68 pages.

#24: BATTLES! KIRBY'S original art fight, JIM SHOOTER, SGT. FURY, GLORY BOAT pencils, more! 68 pages, Kirby/Mignola cover.

KIRBY COLLECTOR #25: S&K! KIRBY, SIMON, SEVERIN intvs., unused BOY EXPLORERS story, MAINLINE COMICS, more! 100 pages.

#26: GODS! COLOR NEW GODS plates, KIRBY & SIMONSON intvs., BIBLICAL INFLUENCES, THOR, MR. MIRACLE, more! 72 pages.

#27: KIRBY INFLUENCE! ALEX ROSS intv., KIRBY FAMILY Roundtable, top pros discuss Kirby's influence! 72 pages, Kirby/ Timm cover.

KIRBY COLLECTOR #28: KIRBY INFLUENCE Two! MARK HAMILL, KRICFALUSI, RUDE, COLLETTA, more! Kirby/Allred cover.

#29: '70s MARVEL WORK! Intvs. with KIRBY, GIFFEN, BUCKLER, '70s COVER GALLERY, more! Kirby/Janson cover.

#30: '80s WORK! ALAN MOORE intv., in-depth look at HUNGER DOGS, SUPER POWERS, SILVER STAR, ANIMATION, more! 68 pages.

COLLECTED KIRBY COLLECTOR, Vol. Two: 160-page trade paperback reprints TJKC #10-12, plus a new section featuring a tour of the Kirby's house, plus over 30 pieces of unpubl. Kirby art!

COLLECTED KIRBY COLLECTOR, Vol. Three: 176-page trade paperback reprints TJKC #13-15, a new introduction by STEVE BISSETTE, plus 30 more new pieces of unpubl. Kirby art!

ORDER BY FAX, PHONE, MAIL, E-MAIL, OR USE OUR SECURE ONLINE STORE:
www.twomorrows.com
These Prices Reflect New 2001 US Postal Rates.

Name _____

Street _____

_____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Country (if outside the US) _____

ENCLOSED IS: ❑ Check or Money Order for US $ _____

CHARGE MY: ❑ VISA ❑ MasterCard

Cardholder's Name: _____

Card # _____

Expiration Date: _____

Telephone: _____

VISA MasterCard

Send US funds, drawn on a US bank, payable to:
TwoMorrows • 1812 Park Dr. • Raleigh, NC 27605
PHONE: 919-833-8092 • FAX: 919-833-8023
E-MAIL: twomorrow@aol.com

SUBSCRIBE! SAVE 10-15%
(NEARLY $1 PER ISSUE!)

All start with current issue.

❑ **COMIC BOOK ARTIST**
(6 Issues + FREE SPECIAL)
❑ $36 STANDARD US
❑ $54 1ST CLASS US
❑ $66 CANADA
❑ $72 SURFACE
❑ $96 AIRMAIL

❑ **ALTER EGO** (4 Issues)
❑ **COMICOLOGY** (4 Issues)
❑ **DRAW!** (4 Issues)
❑ $20 STANDARD US
❑ $32 1ST CLASS US
❑ $40 CANADA
❑ $44 SURFACE
❑ $60 AIRMAIL

❑ **KIRBY COLLECTOR**
(4 Tabloid-Size Issues)
❑ $36 STANDARD US
❑ $52 1ST CLASS US
❑ $60 CANADA
❑ $64 SURFACE
❑ $80 AIRMAIL

SUBSCRIPTION SPEED:
STANDARD US (1-3 weeks)
1ST CLASS US (3-5 days)
CANADA (Canada 1 week)
SURFACE (4-6 wks. foreign)
AIRMAIL (1 week foreign)

BACK ISSUES! (Prices incl. US postage)

COMIC BOOK ARTIST
❑ #7 • $8 US
❑ #9 • $9 US
❑ #10 • $9 US
❑ #11 • $9 US

ALTER EGO
❑ #1 • $8 US
❑ #2 • $8 US
❑ #3 • $8 US
❑ #4 • $8 US
❑ #5 • $8 US
❑ #6 • $8 US
❑ #7 • $8 US

COMICOLOGY
❑ #1 • $8 US
❑ #2 • $8 US
❑ #3 • $8 US

DRAW!
❑ #1 • $8 US

KIRBY COLLECTOR
❑ #18 • $8 US
❑ #20 • $8 US
❑ #21 • $8 US
❑ #22 • $8 US
❑ #23 • $8 US
❑ #24 • $8 US
❑ #25 • $8 US
❑ #26 • $8 US
❑ #27 • $8 US
❑ #28 • $8 US
❑ #29 • $8 US
❑ #30 • $8 US
❑ #31 • $13 US

COMIC BOOK ARTIST COLLECTION VOL. 1
❑ $26 US

COMIC BOOK ARTIST SPECIAL EDITION
❑ $10 US (or FREE by subscribing to CBA)

ALTER EGO: THE CBA COLLECTION
❑ $20 US

COLLECTED KIRBY COLLECTOR VOL. 2
❑ $19 US

COLLECTED KIRBY COLLECTOR VOL. 3
❑ $21 US

KIRBY CHECKLIST
❑ $7 US

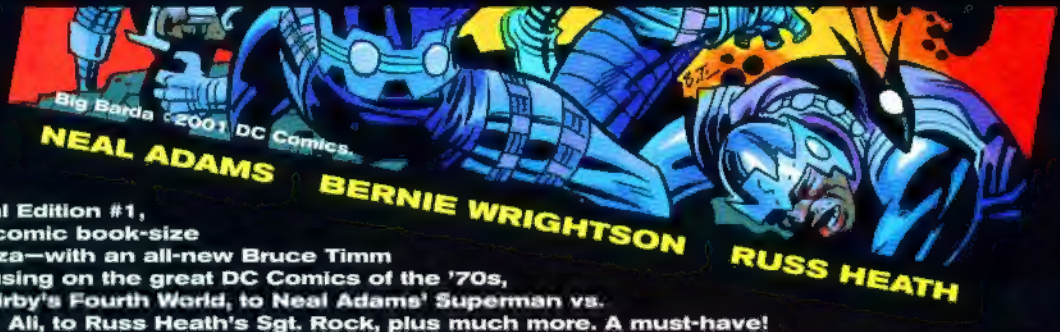
STREETWISE
❑ $24 US

ALL-STAR COMPANION
❑ $24 US

FOR BACK ISSUES OUTSIDE THE US ADD:
$2 Per Item CANADA
$3 Per Item SURFACE
$7 Per Item AIRMAIL

Now Sold Separately!

Subscribe to Comic Book Artist, and CBA Special Edition #1 is Yours FREE—or Buy Your Copy Now While Supplies Last!



Still available FREE through subscription.*

*ALL new subscribers get the Special Edition FREE! (One to a customer, please.)

CBA Special Edition #1, a 68-page comic book-size extravaganza—with an all-new Bruce Timm cover—focusing on the great DC Comics of the '70s, from Jack Kirby's Fourth World, to Neal Adams' Superman vs. Muhammad Ali, to Russ Heath's Sgt. Rock, plus much more. A must-have!

Over a year ago, CBA offered this special issue as a free incentive to increase subscriptions. It was a step we felt was necessary to keep CBA afloat, and it served its purpose: CBA is now on solid footing, due largely to those initial subscribers. Our thanks to everyone who subscribed; we couldn't have done it without you!

Many readers asked us to sell the CBA Special Edition separately, but that would've defeated the book's purpose. Now, due to recent postal increases that have made it prohibitively expensive for many of our overseas readers to subscribe, we're making the remaining copies of CBA Special Edition #1 for sale separately. New subscribers will still receive a free copy (see inside back cover for subscription rates), but now anyone can purchase their own copy, while supplies last.

Only $10 Postpaid in the US ($12 Canada, Elsewhere: $13 Surface, $17 Airmail)